

*Horror in Culture & Entertainment*

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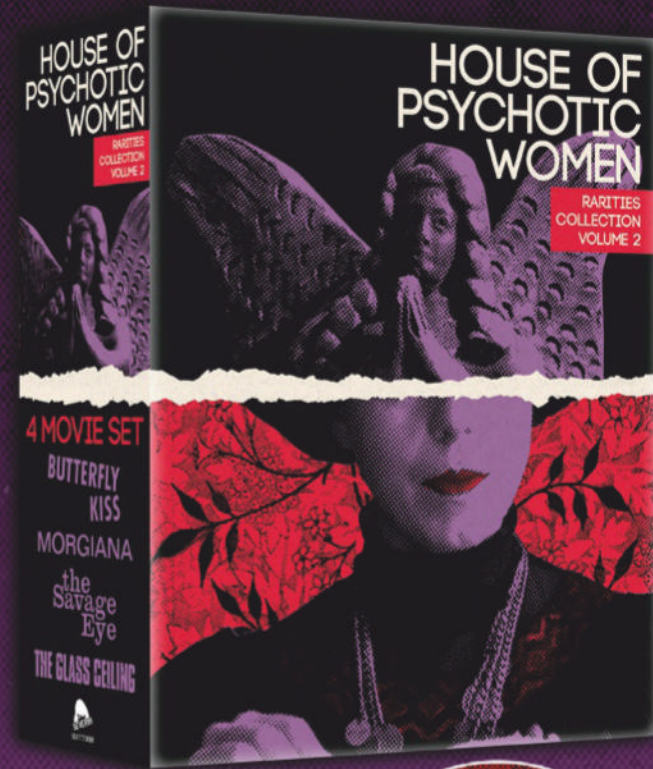
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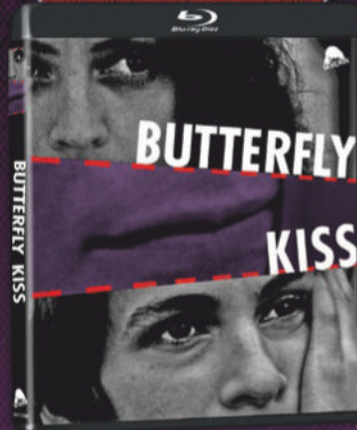
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AS MORE 'PSYCHOTIC WOMEN' FILMS ARE RELEASED,  
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TO INCLUDE NEW DEPICTIONS OF FEMALE MADNESS IN CINEMA."

*Paste Magazine*



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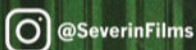
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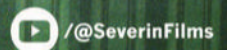
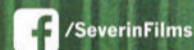


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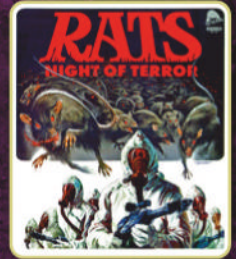
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## 12 DEATH TOLL

*Final Destination: Bloodlines* infuses fresh blood into one of the genre's most enduring franchises, returning this year with a new concept, state-of-the-art kills... and a heartfelt farewell from the legendary Tony Todd.

**PLUS!** A countdown of our favourite kills from the franchise!  
by **JESSICA BUCK**

20



This year, Shudder, the genre-exclusive streaming platform, celebrates ten years of keeping the red stuff flowing – right into your living room. *Rue Morgue* speaks to the minds who pick your nightmares.

**PLUS!** Back from the grave under all-new management, Scream TV resurrects the joys of streaming television for horror fans.  
by **MICHAEL GINGOLD** and **ANDREA SUBISSATI**

## 26 STEP INTO DARKNESS

Out April 29 from Del Rey, Chuck Wendig's *The Staircase in the Woods* is a journey to someplace strange and frightening.

by **OWEN WILLIAMS**

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**PLUS!** De Van's continued deconstruction of the body horror genre.  
by **ROCCO T. THOMPSON**

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DEBATE: What is the most quintessentially Canadian horror film ever made?



# NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

**R**emember when we thought that the COVID lockdowns were the most surreal years we'd see in our lifetimes? It feels quaint now to look back at 2020 Andrea sitting at her desk, cancelling her international travel plans, worrying about the health of her loved ones, and rewatching *The Office* for the umpteenth time – obviously secure in the belief that this historical event was probably as inconvenient as things might get. Then, the following year, I sat at that same desk on January 6, watching news footage of a guy in a fur head-dress storming the American Capitol and thinking that humanity might have finally jumped the shark.

I needn't reiterate all the gobsmacking, jaw-dropping, mind-blistering lunacy that has transpired since then. I pity those journalists out there who have had to report on the news with a straight face and I've been grateful that the bulk of this absolute buffoonery was out of my hands, if not far from my mind.

Then, fuck. He did it. He came for Canada and now I have to write about what he's done.

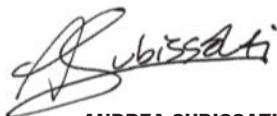
Up to fairly recently, I thought a tariff was the British term for a toll fare, and I was quietly happy to remain in that quaint parochial ignorance for the rest of my days. Alas, I've no interest in taking YouTube Economics 101, so I'll just stick to terms that I can use with some confidence while sticking to the brass tacks.

Tariff hikes are bad for independent Canadian businesses whose main consumer base is in the USA. *Rue Morgue* is one such business, and so tariff hikes are bad for us – and by extension, you. New and inexplicable changes to our trade situation have immediate and unforeseeable consequences for our small operation and, to put it crudely, someone's gotta eat that cost. *We don't want that to be you.*

This means that *Rue Morgue's* prices will not change – for now, anyway – nor will the quality of our pages; editorially, cosmetically, or otherwise. As before, the best way to support our magazine is to subscribe directly, circumventing the commercial machinations of newsstand commerce that will undoubtedly be most affected by this conflict. It's our fervent hope that the increasingly dystopian trajectory of our international relations will improve but, for now, as we watch the headlines, wild-eyed, cackling madly like so much Sally Hardesty, we'll just keep on keeping on.

And speaking of utter and total madness, we've added a new lunatic to our roster of columnists! Please join us in welcoming S. Elizabeth, whose culture column, *The Ghoul Next Door*, makes its grand debut this issue. Her maiden entry on death cafes, where those interested in speaking of the unspeakable gather to discuss a deeply repressed topic, feels eerily appropriate as I endeavour to write this editorial without using the word "fascism." Ah crap, there she goes.

I jest, my friends, because to stop laughing would be to start screaming, perchance to never stop. America will one day be great again, it just might take a few (exactly four) years. In the meantime, we have other monsters to discuss...



ANDREA SUBISSATI  
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**RUE MORGUE #224** would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of Hollywood Suite, Reel Talk, James Fisher, Michael Rainbow, *Skibidi Toilet*, and Al McMullan.

Cover: *Final Destination: Bloodlines*  
Design by Shane Mills

We acknowledge the land that *Rue Morgue* is created upon is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

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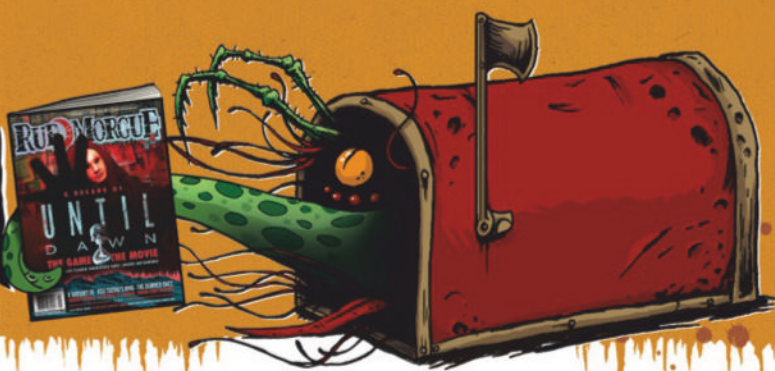
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# POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



**I JUST WANT TO TELL YOU** how thoroughly gratifying and meaningful your writing about Clive Barker in the most recent issue of *Rue Morgue* was. As a lover of Barker's twisted worlds, it was a delight to read your own take on the man's work and his impact on you. The feature itself was a great update on Barker's current work – an insightful look into the life of someone not getting the exposure he once did. A loving tribute. I am a writer and film critic, mostly focusing on horror, cult, and noir films, and *Rue Morgue* has been a consistent quality-driven print and online magazine for me in recent years. The Dark Delicacies piece in this issue was also a highlight. Just wanted to share these words with you and introduce myself. I look forward to more *Rue Morgue* in 2025 and hopefully more of Clive Barker's work on any medium! Fingers crossed for all the projects he mentioned.

**GABRIEL SERRANO DENIS, VIA EMAIL**

**I'M SORRY TO SEE** that Koji Suzuki's *Ring* is not available on Kindle in Canada. I heard of the book many years ago (around the time the remake first came out) and your article really made me want to track it down and read it. Anyway, I was surprised that it's only available in hard copy and also a bit pricey in my opinion.

**CONRAD WALSH, VIA EMAIL**

**I AM WRITING IN SUPPORT OF** – and follow-up to – Brian Pedersen's letter in the Jan/Feb 2025 issue [RM#222]. I also agree that the magazine does a great job on issues of diversity and really appreciate it. But I think an overlooked component of this is disability justice and recognising the ongoing (according to the World Health Organization) COVID pandemic. It's tough to see that left out, especially when the horror community is [made up] of people [who have] not traditionally fit in. It would be great to see it acknowledged more in associated events such as virtual options where possible and encouraging/modelling masking in public indoor spaces. Horror fans are well positioned to resist the OBEY/CONSUME forced return to "normal" and stick up for marginalised people. Thanks, keep fighting the good fight and providing great horror content!

**JAMES SESSFORD, VIA EMAIL**

**WOW!** I can't wait to watch *Until Dawn*. The game received inspiration from horror movie classics

such as *Evil Dead II*, *Poltergeist*, *Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil*. Now *Until Dawn* is going from game to movie. I am sitting here salivating thinking about it!

**PAUL DALE ROBERTS, VIA EMAIL**



**RE: RM#129** – *Cabal* was one of the first Barker books I read and it's truly unforgettable. I was expecting pain-hungry Cenobites but instead got "monsters" that had more humanity than the more regular-appearing folks. Maybe I am biased, but I thought the casting of [David] Cronenberg as Dr. Decker was perfect. The crazed psychiatrist is one of the creepiest characters I've

ever read, and DC nails the part with calm and cold accuracy. His voice is so placid, so it paired with bloodthirsty actions, and donning a horrifying mask makes it even more alarming. I think there are many of us who can relate to feeling like they would be better off in their own Midian. The folks there may be social outcasts but they are not required to adhere to societal norms. There is freedom and the ability to be extraordinary when you are accepted for who you are, and I appreciate the heck out of Clive for being someone who has been unapologetic about who he is and who he loves.

**@WEEPINGBROOK, VIA INSTAGRAM**

**RE: LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE** on *Rue Morgue TV* – [Dani Filth is] one of the very few (black) metal musicians that is still relevant/believable to me after *all* these years (I first got *The Principle* LP sometime in 1994), 'cause I *know* he is 666% into the topics he is writing/singing about also in his private life (unlike other "black metal" musicians – note the quotes). So, it's always *fascinating* to hear/read anything from him! And to hear his view on a fresh, recent horror film that's *new* to me! Really enjoyable interview here, thanks Aaron!

**@DOMENTORTHEONLYTRUE, VIA YOUTUBE**

**DID YOU GUYS EVER** cover a film called *The Addiction*? It's a strange vampire movie shot entirely in black and white, came out in the mid-1990s, I think. The film is unusual and has a very philosophical and depressing tone. Also, Christopher Walken is in it, so it can't be that bad, right? Anyway, I thought you guys might like to look into it. Great mag, by the way.

**DOUGLAS PETERS, VIA EMAIL**

*We are aware (and are admirers) of Abel Ferrara's The Addiction but we have no recollection of ever having reviewed it. Not sure how that happened! -Ed*

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LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR LENGTH AND/OR CONTENT.





# CORONER'S REPORT

## WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

ISSUE #  
224

As a child, Cassandra "Elvira" Peterson was badly burned by boiling water and spent three months in hospital undergoing skin grafts to over 35% of her body.

In 2013, two boys in Canada were strangled by a 100-pound python that climbed through the vents from the pet shop below. The snake's owner was later cleared of negligence.

Blockbuster Video's 1992 expansion into Japan failed miserably, as their family-friendly mandate did not mix well with the country's taste for extreme horror and pornography.

Despite being treatable if caught early, rabies still kills almost 60,000 people a year.

*Cherophobia* is described as the fear of happiness.

Gothic literature describes the distinction between "terror" and "horror" as: the dread that leads up to the experience (the former), and the feeling that comes after (the latter).

Coralie Fargeat's *The Substance* is the seventh horror film to be nominated for Best Picture at the Oscars.

Katherine Knight was the first woman in Australia to be given a life sentence. In 2000, she stabbed her boyfriend 37 times, then skinned and cooked some of his body parts before attempting to serve them to his children.

While working as a taxi driver in the 1980s, struggling musician Q Lazzarus picked up director Jonathan Demme who was so struck by her music that he used it in many of his films, most notably "Goodbye Horses" in *The Silence of the Lambs*.

In 2008, Doritos released an online horror game for Halloween called *Hotel 626* that included calling participants in the middle of the night to scare them.

The famous "What are you waiting for!?" scene in *I Know What You Did Last Summer* was conceived and directed by a young contest winner.

You are significantly more likely to die on or near your birthday, a statistical phenomenon known as "the birthday effect."

While filming *Inland Empire*, David Lynch famously asked for "a one-legged woman, a monkey, and a lumberjack by 3:15." When a producer protested, star Laura Dern said, "You're on a Lynch movie, dude. Just enjoy the ride."

COMPILED BY JAY CLARKE  
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*[Signature]*

FURTHER ACTION ☒

HOMICIDE ☐

## EXPIRING MINDS

ON RUE MORQUE'S  
SOCIAL MEDIA

Who would you like to portray Death in a horror movie and why?

Elizabeth Short, if she'd lived long enough to be an actress.

BETHANY OTIS, VIA FACEBOOK

Idris Elba. Gravitas, baby.

@CARSCATSandMOVIES,  
VIA INSTAGRAM

Paul Giamatti. Just to catch everyone off guard. And have him chew the scenery in the most over-the-top way.

RENO DEE, VIA FACEBOOK

Mike Myers – just so he can make a reference to Michael Myers.

COLIN BAXTER, VIA FACEBOOK

Richard Brake because I feel like Death as a skinny, smooth-talking but inherently suspicious type would be amazing.

LIAM BYRD, VIA FACEBOOK

Willem Dafoe, 'cause look at him.

JAMES RYAN SHAFT, VIA FACEBOOK

## FINAL WORDS

AS CAPTIONED BY YOU ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA



"MURDER-SUICIDE FOR DUMMIES"

THIS MONTH'S CAPTION CONTEST WINNER IS  
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## THE LIFE AND CRIMES OF H.H. HOLMES

The 2022 video game *The Devil in Me* features many of the horror elements one might expect from Supermassive Games, the same company that released the popular *Until Dawn*. It features a format where small choices by the player can result in wildly different outcomes for the story, pulling inspiration from such cinematic classics as *Psycho* and *Friday the 13th*. But *The Devil in Me* also draws from a macabre page in American history as the protagonists find themselves in the shadow of one of history's earliest known serial killers: H.H. Holmes.

Born Herman Webster Mudgett in New Hampshire in May 1861, Holmes fits the stereotypical profile of the United States serial killer: raised by an abusive father, he developed a fascination for dissecting animals that carried him into an education in medicine. He graduated from the University of Michigan's Department of Medicine and Surgery with middling grades – possibly due to the fact that, between classes, he was busy using the school's educational cadavers to defraud insurance companies.

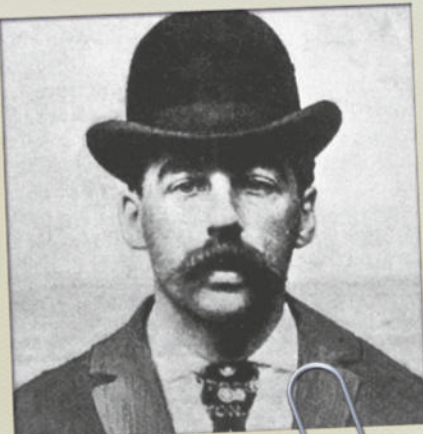
Modern depictions of serial killers paint a picture of brilliantly twisted, perversely romanticized minds, but Holmes seems to have

been primarily a con man who used murder to cover up other nefarious misdeeds. He often murdered people who participated in his many acts of fraud or the women he had affairs with during his three marriages. It's hard to gauge just how many people he killed, because he was also a compulsive liar who confessed to murdering people who were later verified to still be alive.

But while murder seemed to be a means to an end for him, Holmes' staggering disregard for human life is what ultimately led to his downfall. After killing employee Benjamin Pitezel, seemingly to avoid having to pay him off after yet another insurance scheme, Holmes also murdered three of Pitezel's children for reasons that remain unclear. Perhaps he was trying to tie up loose ends, or maybe he wanted to see if he could get away with it.

Investigators were eventually able to tie him to the murders and the sensational news coverage surrounding his capture and eventual hanging in 1896 ran rampant in spite of the absence of clear facts. The peak of the yellow journalism surrounding the case was Holmes' infamous, but largely fabricated, "Murder Castle." While Holmes did build a hotel in Chicago and likely committed some of his murders there, reports of secret murder rooms and torture chambers were mainly imagined.

As is often the case, the legend endured well



beyond Holmes himself, as in addition to *The Devil in Me*, the killer has been the subject of numerous books, documentaries, and television episodes. And while a long-rumoured movie project starring Leonardo DiCaprio never quite materialized, the fact that Holmes remains in our minds over a century later just goes to show that we cannot get enough of a killer story!

BRYAN CHRISTOPHER

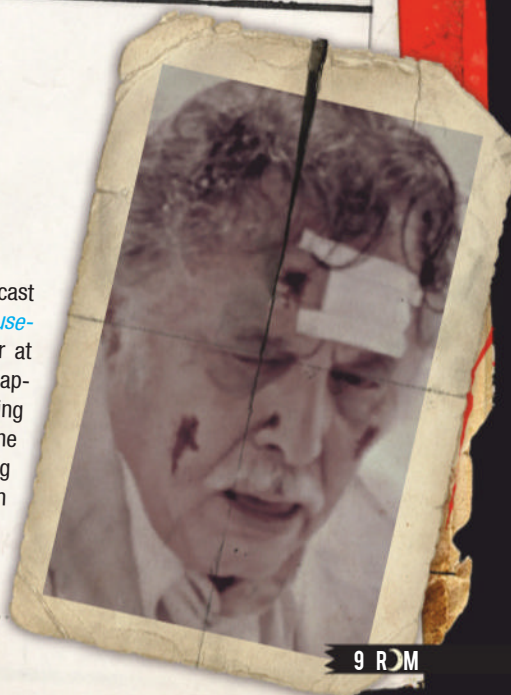
## WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

**Lincoln Maazel, "The Old Man/Narrator" from *The Amusement Park* (1975)**

◀ A shy young boy, Lincoln Maazel spent his early years singing in secret, concealing a prodigious talent that would remain unacknowledged until he entered a New York talent contest at the age of sixteen. Moving to Los Angeles, Maazel began performing as a club singer while studying to be a pharmacist. However, he all but abandoned this burgeoning career in the mid-1930s, devoting his time to the support of his musically gifted son – Lorin Maazel, future orchestra conductor of international renown. Later encouraged by his wife to

answer ads for singers, Maazel found himself cast in a production of Agatha Christie's *The Mouse-trap*, beginning a prolific stage acting career at the age of 56. After *The Amusement Park*, he appeared for Romero again two years later, taking the role of Cuda in 1977's *Martin*, after which he returned to stage work. He died in 2009, having lived out his final years as an active centenarian on Lorin's ranch in Virginia.

LOUIS FLETCHER





# NEEDFUL THINGS



## 1 ZOMBIE COCKTAIL MIX IN A TIKI GLASS

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[Urbanpalate.ca](http://Urbanpalate.ca)

## 2 ALIEN FACEHUGGER WINDOW CLINGER

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Is your back seat the warmest place to hide? Us horror fans need no further reason to deck out our wheels with the genre we love, but this plush Facehugger window clinger might also make that jackass in the Cybertruck think twice about cutting you off!

[Kidrobot.com](http://Kidrobot.com)

## 3 SKELETON HAND OVEN MITTS

\$11.99 USD

Anyone who's ever burned their hands to the bone knows that caution is advisable when working with high heat. And what better way to protect your paws than with oven mitts that double as an x-ray scan of your frightful phalanges? Don't fear the sear!

[Vampirefreaks.com](http://Vampirefreaks.com)

## 4 REST IN PEACE SILK SLEEP MASK

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Sleep like the dead with the help of this bedtime mask made of crisp silk fabric – stretchy, smooth, and cozy – and embroidered with the idiom that offers eternal rest! Available in gravestone grey and deathly (tired) black for your nocturnal repose.

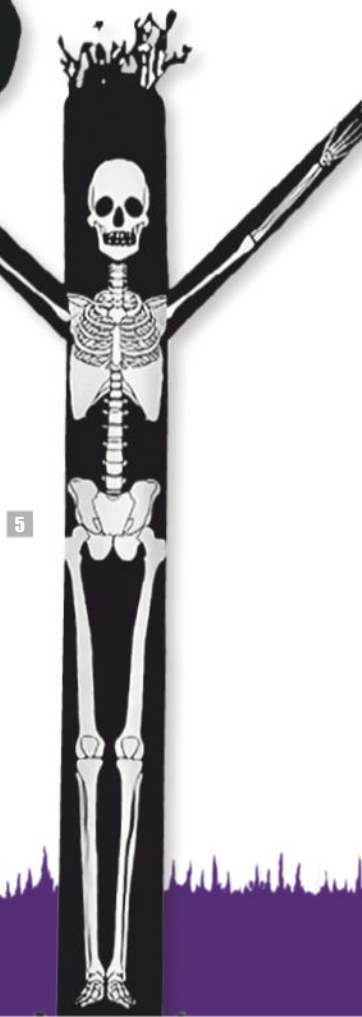
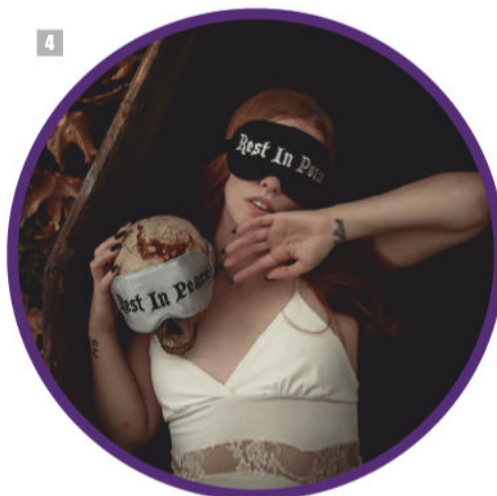
[Livelyghosts.com](http://Livelyghosts.com)

## 5 SKELETON INFLATABLE TUBE MAN

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We all long to stab those hideous inflatable Christmas lawn ornaments until they lie limp on our neighbour's driveway like a boneless corpse. But behold, the ultimate revenge decoration! This inflatable skeleton is available with or without a blower (required to make it dance) in your choice of size for ideal flop factor!

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## HANDMADE HORRORS

### CARLA BENDIXEN'S NEEDLE-FELTED ART

The hooded figure of the Grim Reaper emerges from darkness to point a skeletal finger at the next mortal doomed to die. This legendary spectre has horrified generations by personifying our inevitable demise, but felt sculptor Carla Bendixen prefers her Death rendered in ways more whimsical, soft, and strangely adorable. Sculpted from wool and clutching a fuzzy scythe, Bendixen's Reaper embodies a unique blend of humour and horror.

"I like to put my own interpretation into these pieces," she tells *Rue Morgue*. "After submerging myself in their folklore, I take a lot of liberties and let each individual personality develop as I create. Every piece I make takes on its own personality, and my scary little creatures often make me giggle."

With a background in painting, the Winnipeg native studied traditional sculpture in college, but now enjoys building macabre figures in a softer medium. Needle felting involves using specialty notched needles to repeatedly stab raw wool into solid shapes, resulting in unique, plushy sculptures. For Bendixen, the juxtaposition of a macabre subject rendered in cozy and comforting textures is as fulfilling to make as it

is to behold.

"With wool, I can create the shape with a barbed needle much like I would mould clay with my fingers or tools," she explains. "I love the feeling of wool's soothing softness and the oddly calming motion of stabbing it repetitively with the needle."

Alongside her best-selling tiny Reapers, Bendixen offers a variety of eerie pieces including snake-headed plants, bleeding heart trees, and multicoloured dragon's eggs. Her first foray into horror-themed sculpture began with a historical figure that's risen to prominence in recent years.

"During the pandemic, I became fascinated with plague doctors," she says. "I feel like they were the heroes of their time. They were my first of the darker pieces, and from that moment I was hooked. I'm also fascinated with the unknown or undiscovered, so you'll find many cryptids in my work."

Her shop now features felt sculptures of other well-known figures (Jackalope, Krampus, the Loch Ness Monster) alongside one of her own creation: the Snowy Griffin, which takes inspiration from a real-life predator lurking outside Bendixen's window.

"Here on our little farm there is a great horned owl that we call Lord Feather, who's become a recurring figure in my art," she says. "Over the years he has taken the heads of ten of our chickens. He is beautifully magnificent and sinister at the same time."

And while Bendixen finds her work relaxing and cathartic, she admits it also has its dangers.

"There are sharp little barbs on the last inch of the needle by the tip that grab the wool fibres and intertwine them to bring the wool into a solid piece," she says. "With a continuous stabbing motion, you can watch the wool go from fluff to a solid shape, but if you accidentally stab your fingers, the barbs really hurt!"

Find the full line of fuzzy freaks on Bendixen's [Etsy](#) shop.

JENN ADAMS

## CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES

### THE EXORCIST EXTREME HEAD KNOCKER (NECA, 2008)

When released to cinemas in the winter of 1973, William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* had audiences fainting, vomiting, and running for the exits. Moviegoers had never witnessed anything like the demonic possession of twelve-year-old Regan MacNeil – transforming her from an innocent girl into a levitating, head-spinning, profanity-spewing hellspawn. More than three decades after the film's theatrical debut, *Exorcist*-themed merchandise began being produced by manufacturers – among them popular collectibles company NECA, which released a deluxe resin bobblehead of Regan in 2008 as part of its "Ex-

treme Head Knockers" line. Standing nearly six inches tall, the highly detailed nodder depicts the possessed girl restrained to her bed – sitting atop a base resembling a wooden floor. Both the bed itself and the figure's head – which perfectly resembles a scarred Linda Blair dripping green vomit – feature bobbing action. NECA would later re-release the bobblehead in different packaging, but the original 2008 release can be found on [eBay](#) for \$60 to \$100 USD.

JAMES BURRELL

MORE CRYPTIC COLLECTIBLES AT RUE-MORQUE.COM





*FINAL DESTINATION: BLOODLINES* INFUSES  
FRESH BLOOD INTO ONE OF THE GENRE'S  
MOST ENDURING FRANCHISES, RETURNING  
THIS YEAR WITH A NEW CONCEPT, STATE-OF-  
THE-ART KILLS, AND A HEARTFELT FAREWELL  
FROM THE LEGENDARY **TONY TODD**

# DEATH TOLL

BY **JESSICA BUCK**







**Torched:** As is tradition for *Final Destination* films, *Bloodlines* starts with an epic opening disaster sequence that burns its way deeper into audiences' psyches throughout the entire film.

**B**ack at the turn of the millennium, a teen horror film turned a lot of people into nervous flyers when Alex Browning (played by then-unknown Devon Sawa) deboarded a plane after having a vision of it going down in flames, only for it to explode upon takeoff. The first *Final Destination* (2000) introduced audiences to the idea that while a group of teens may temporarily cheat death, it will come back for them twofold — a concept that gave rise to a franchise with the most outlandish, violent, and gory kills ever committed to screen [see sidebar]. And while it's been over a decade since *Final Destination 5* (2011), a new installment is shooting fresh blood into the concept and reviving it for a new generation of fright fans.

Hitting theatres May 16, *Final Destination: Bloodlines* finds college student Stefanie (Kaitlyn Santa Juana) flunking out of school due to her recurring nightmare about an observation tower visit gone terribly, ridiculously awry. Returning to her family home, Stefanie discovers that her nightmares may have something to do with her estranged grandmother (Gabrielle Rose), who has abandoned the family to hide in a heavily fortified shack on the outskirts of town. But when Grandma lets her guard down for a mere moment, she meets a terrible (and hilariously unpredictable) fate that triggers a chain reaction of unlikely expiry all the way along her bloodline. Now it's up to Stefanie and kin to figure out how to escape this curse before death prunes every

branch of the family tree.

That's what happens in the film, but let's be real — the real point of any *Final Destination* movie is the kills, and *Bloodlines* pushes the envelope further than ever with an all-new buffet of improbable (but technically possible) "accidents," and more red herrings than the Baltic Sea. If the first *Final Destination* film did for flying what *Jaws* did for swimming, viewers of this latest installment can expect to develop phobias

**"A FINAL  
DESTINATION KILL  
HAS TO HIT THIS  
RIGHT TONE WHERE  
IT CAN'T BE SO  
REALISTIC THAT IT'S  
NOT FUN, WHILE NOT  
BEING SO FUN THAT  
IT'S UNREALISTIC."**

— CO-DIRECTOR ZACH LIPOVSKY

pertaining (but not limited) to elevators, dance floors, pennies, engagement rings, pianos, trash compactors, soccer balls, body piercings, and of course, log trucks.

But that's not to say that *Bloodlines* is mere-

ly following a tried-and-true formula. Thanks to filmmaking duo Zach Lipovsky and Adam B. Stein (2018's *Freaks*), the long-awaited sixth entry lives up to its subtitle by keeping the carnage contained to a caring family unit whose affection for one another adds to the terror and suspense. Further, in a truly memorable twist of fate, *Bloodlines* was shot just in time to bring the legendary Tony Todd back for what would end up being his final film. The only mainstay across the series, appearing as the creepy funeral director William Bludworth, Todd had become a staple of *FD*'s ongoing mythology, where the franchise's hapless teens learn the rules of life and death. His brief appearance, shot before his passing in November 2024, gives an acute sense of the veteran actor addressing his fans for what he may have known would be the last time.

*Rue Morgue* spoke with the film's directors about working with Todd, coming up with fresh kills, and the staged gag that landed them the gig in the first place.

**What drew you to *Bloodlines*?**

**Adam Stein:** *Final Destination* is absolutely iconic. We both loved the franchise since the beginning and all the creative ways that it has killed people over the years. And then when we read the script that was based on Jon Watts' story idea, which sets the movie around an extended family and a family tree, that really excited us because we love stories about family and, in par-



ticular, stories that have more character layers and depth along with the horror.

**Zach Lipovsky:** *Final Destination* is not necessarily known for its character-driven narratives, but this one really found a way to blend everything people love about the franchise and give it an update in the way that horror has evolved in the last fourteen, fifteen years, to be much more character-driven than it was in the early 2000s. That part of it was the most exciting.

**Was there any pressure to stick with the franchise's established tone?**

**ZL:** People are used to *Final Destination* movies having a certain structure – opening with a big set piece and then redoing that set piece, and those people are set to die. All the films have followed that to a tee. This film plays with that structure in a way that I think will still be honouring and true to all the rules that have been established, but really freshening up the form, which I think will also be really exciting for people. So, in general, both with the characters and with the structure, we tried to really honour where *FD* started, but take it somewhere new, which I think fans are really gonna love.

**AS:** [People] should know that the biggest challenge to making a *Final Destination* movie is crafting death sequences that are surprising and twisty because everyone knows that character's gonna die in this scene.

**ZL:** And also not repeat anything that's been done before! My previous movies all had incredibly talented teams coming up with all the most relatably horrific ways to take people out, and we didn't wanna repeat a single thing that had been done before. So, it was quite a challenge to look for new things and bring that to the screen, but I think we really achieved it, and it created some very surprising scenes.

**Did you consult engineers to ask if it is even physically possible for these death sequences to happen?**

**AS:** Yes, actually.

**ZL:** These scenes are a massively collaborative, many-year-long brainstorm. It takes years to come up with how to put these together, and it's a huge collaboration between us, the writers, the producers who've been on these films for so long, all of our heads of department – all of whom have incredibly specific expertise in engineering and in production design and prop design. And you get into these huge boardrooms where everyone is just throwing around ideas. And you go, "That's really great, but how would we get to this?"

**AS:** And "Would a lawnmower really do that?"



**Pain Is Pleasure:** For co-writers/directors Adam B. Stein (left) and Zach Lipovsky, *FD*'s preposterous kills had to tickle the audience's funny bone while also grossing them out.

**ZL:** Not only does it have to make sense, it has to also hit this right tone where it can't be so realistic that it's not fun, while not being so fun that it's unrealistic. You've gotta be in this middle ground. And so, there were a lot of times where we'd be pitching something we really wanted to do and then people would be like, "But it would never do that," and you're like, "Oh, okay."

**How did you handle the all-important FX, practically or CGI?**

**ZL:** For very visceral things, your brain needs to believe that it's happening, so we try and do as much as we can practically or at least get as close as you can. There are ob-

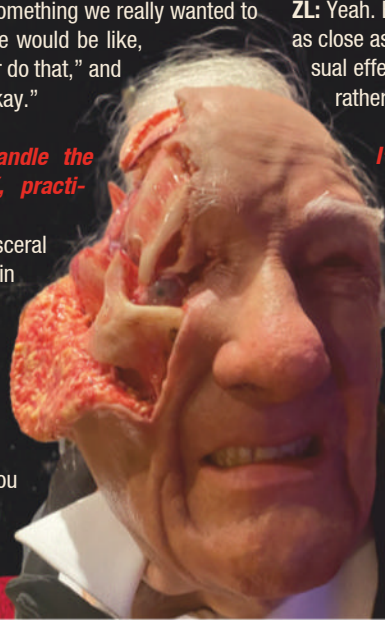
viously certain things you can't do to a human body practically.

**AS:** But that's what special effects makeup is for.

**ZL:** Yeah. Basically, it's just always trying to get as close as we can physically and then using visual effects around it to erase the magic trick rather than be the trick itself.

**I've heard a rumour that you guys staged a *Final Destination*-esque death hoax scene in order to get this film. Is that true?**

**AS:** Yeah, that's true! A lot of people don't realize that directors basically audition for jobs just like actors do: you read the script and you go on a Zoom [call] to pitch the vision for the movie, and we create decks to show them what we would do with each scene and







**"WE TRIED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WE COULD RUIN FOR PEOPLE IN THIS MOVIE SO THAT EVERY TIME YOU SCOOP ICE INTO A CUP OR SEE THE GARBAGE TRUCK DRIVE BY, YOU'RE REMEMBERING OUR MOVIE."**

— CO-DIRECTOR ADAM B. STEIN

how we'd execute the film. But the hardest thing to communicate when you're doing that, is tone. How do you communicate fun, for instance? So, Zach had this idea for how to use the Zoom virtual background feature to meld live pitching with special effects for an experience where my head could get chopped off. And so, using the MacBook camera, we set it up in exactly the position that we would do the next day (so the light coming in the room would be the same) and then we spent 24 hours doing the effects on that, right before our pitch. It was very nerve-wracking to be in this pitch meeting with the heads of New Line and Jon Watts and the producers of *Final Destination*, pitching our vision, and then switching over to a pre-recorded background, knowing that once we [committed to the gag], we would not be able to stop!

**What was the gag?**

**ZL:** There was a fireplace behind us that started to light the room on fire, and ... we were just pitching as if nothing was happening. So, everyone [on the call] started pointing behind us, and so we got up and started dealing with the fire. When we put the fire out, they thought that was the end, so they're all, like, clapping. But during the fire sequence, we had turned on this huge ceiling fan. And then we sat down, apologizing for the interruption, when

the ceiling fan broke off and chopped Adam's head off! So, the really fun part of that was that it was this double surprise, which is exactly what happens in *Final Destination*! What you think is gonna get somebody isn't what actually gets them.

**Amazing. Tell us about the process of co-directing a movie like this. Do you divide the tasks?**

**ZL:** Yeah. We do everything twice. [laughs]

**AS:** We're just next to each other all the time going, "What if we do this?" and building on each other's ideas. Prep is really where the movie is built, so when you're shooting it, you're

capturing those moments that you thought of six months ago. By the time we're on set, we are already thinking of the movie in the exact same way, and we know exactly what we need. There have been a lot of times where it feels like we're reading each other's minds because one of us will be next to the camera, one of us will be at the monitors, and we'll [both] say "Cut." It's kind of like a directing superpower, having a partner like that.

**What would you say is the most critical part of a *Final Destination* movie?**

**AS:** It's definitely the kills. The kills are what makes *Final Destination*: the creative, twisty, unexpected kills that stick with you, sometimes for years. We always talked about what we can ruin for people, like the way log trucks are ruined for everyone forever,



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# SPECTACLE OF DEATH

BY JESSICA BUCK

## 5 BATHTUB STRANGULATION **FINAL DESTINATION (2000)**

Death was just getting warmed up in this debut installment, but it didn't spare the franchise's first victim Tod Waggner (Chad Donella). Slipping on a wet bathroom floor, he clotheslines himself (literally) and ends up strangled in the tub. While it's not the strangest kill in the series, it set the formula that the franchise would follow with a whole school of red herrings swimming around before the final *coup de grâce*. Adding insult to injury, the incident comes off as a suicide!

## 4 POOL DRAIN BUTT PLUG **THE FINAL DESTINATION (2009)**

When pretty boy Hunt Wynorski (Nick Zano) dives into a swimming pool on a hot summer day, he likely didn't anticipate winding up with his asshole sealed tightly on the drain. Faster than you can say "suck my butt" – out went his bowels! It's unclear whether this scene was inspired by the memorable "Guts" storyline from Chuck Palahniuk's *Haunted*, but either one will leave you clenching yours.







### 3 BARBED WIRE BISECTION

#### *FINAL DESTINATION 2 (2003)*

This quick and cartoonish kill is part of a double whammy that starts with Kat Jennings (Keegan Connor Tracy), who drops her lit cigarette into a fuel spill after her steering wheel airbag deploys, impaling her head on a pipe. This causes an explosion that rockets a length of barbed-wire fence straight into Rory Peters (Jonathan Cherry), slicing him into three neat sections. All that's missing is a cartoon "yikes!" flag before he slowly falls to pieces.

### 2 TAN BED BARBECUE

#### *FINAL DESTINATION 3 (2006)*

In this one, basic babes Ashley (Chelan Simmons) and Ashlyn (Crystal Lowe) succumb to perhaps the most iconic scene of the naughty oughties. After jumping into side-by-side tanning beds, condensation from their slushees drips into the HVAC, surging the heat of the beds. This sets off a string of events that sees them getting roasted alive in their makeshift crematories. Pass the sunscreen!

### 1 CRACKED GYMNAST

#### *FINAL DESTINATION 5 (2011)*

After somehow dodging myriad OSHA violations at her gym, Candice Hooper (Ellen Wroe) is primed for a perfect dismount from the uneven bars... that is, until her teammate knocks over the hand chalk, clouding her vision, and sending her flying, chest-first onto the mat, cracked in half like a broken Barbie doll. Ouch!



laser eye surgery, tanning beds – those iconic *Final Destination* [moments], relatable experiences or objects that are ruined forever. We tried to figure out what we could ruin for people in this movie so that every time you scoop ice into a cup or see the garbage truck drive by, you're remembering our movie.

**ZL:** Another huge piece that we put a massive amount of effort into thinking about was the opening of the movie. A *Final Destination* opening is iconic, you know? Each one of them is amazing, and each one of them tries to outdo the last one. And they're so memorable, they're so epic. Just being given the chance to make a *Final Destination* opening set piece is such an amazing privilege as a filmmaker. We really put a huge amount of effort into trying to make sure that this one brought something to that legacy that felt worthy of all the other films. And a huge amount of the shooting time of the movie was just that opening 25 minutes.

**Did any of the kills end up on the cutting room floor?**

**ZL:** We did have an entire sequence out of Chuck E. Cheese that we weren't able to do. That would have been pretty fantastic.

**People are afraid of log trucks thanks to *Final Destination* – how did you go about composing the kills around objects and situations that people are already afraid of?**

**ZL:** Like Adam said earlier, a big part of choosing the kills is entirely [based on] how relatable they are, because there were a lot of ideas that came up where we were like,

"Yeah... but no one really ever experiences that in their day-to-day life, and so it's not a great idea for this movie." It could work in another type of horror film, but [*FD* kills] always need to involve things that we are constantly surrounded by. That's what makes it feel like *FD* – the everyday, pedestrian, relatable stuff that now, every time you see it in your regular life, you'll never be

**AS:** [Fear of] heights was a big part of structuring the beginning [sequence]. We were brainstorming with the writers, like "What could that opening sequence be to really make it sing?" and we started talking about fear of airplanes, fear of roller coasters, fear of driving on the highway... those are very relatable things, right? What could we do that could lead to a big, horrible disaster sequence that is based on a relatable fear? And so, having it be the fear of

heights, we really tried to help the audience experience the fear of heights by the way we shot it.

By the way, the set was designed to really give you that feeling of vertigo and make you feel like you're about to fall off a building... especially in IMAX.

**It was very poignant seeing Tony Todd, especially now that**

**he's passed. At that time, did you have a sense that this might be his last movie?**

**AS:** We didn't know that it was going to be his last movie, but he had been sick for a long time, and we were grateful that he was excited to come out [at all]. He was so joyful on set, but you could tell he was physically frail. We knew that this would probably be his last *Final Destination* movie because

these movies take years and years to make. So, in thinking about it being his last *Final Destination* movie, we talked with everyone – the writers, the producers, and with Tony – about, "What do you want to say to the fans? What do you want to leave them with?" And what he says [in the movie] about enjoying life, enjoying every single second, how life is precious... those were his words from the heart to the fans, and that's what he wanted to say.

**We won't give away the ending, but how do you wrap up a narrative in a movie that's such a link in an ongoing chain?**

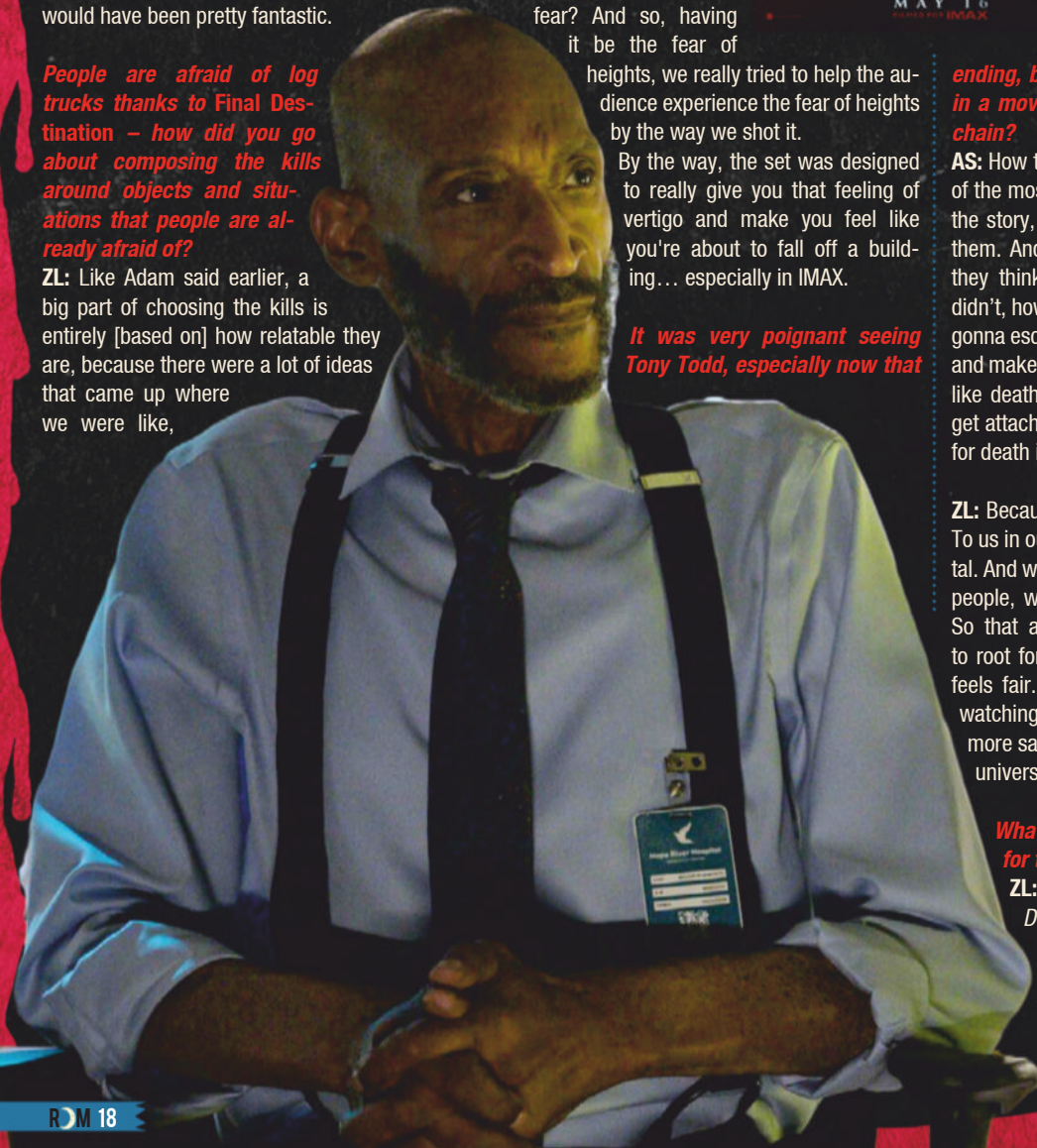
**AS:** How to end a *Final Destination* movie is one of the most challenging things when it comes to the story, because you know death is still after them. And when it cuts to the epilogue, where they think they got away and you know they didn't, how is death gonna get them? Or are they gonna escape? It's such a tricky thing to balance and make it surprising and fun, while also feeling like death got his goal fulfilled. A lot of people get attached to the characters, but you also root for death in these movies. That's a big part of it.

**ZL:** Because it's unfair that they cheated death! To us in our everyday lives, we know we're mortal. And when our time comes, we die. And these people, when their time came, they didn't die. So that allows you, as an audience member, to root for them to eventually die because that feels fair. It's a very different experience than watching torture porn or something that's a lot more sadistic. It's actually a rebalancing of the universe.

**What do you guys foresee as the future for the franchise?**

**ZL:** There's always gonna be more *Final Destination* movies.

**AS:** Death never takes a break. ☠️





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# YEARS of FEAR



BY **MICHAEL GINGOLD**



**B**ack in 2015, AMC Networks answered a prayer that horror fans hadn't even dared utter aloud: an all-horror streaming service. This year marks the 10th anniversary of Shudder living up to its name, having become a key destination for genre fans seeking a wide range of scary entertainment, and filmmakers seeking a platform that truly understands and appreciates their dark artistic goals. Throughout the past ten years, Shudder has expanded significantly from its early days as a showcase for existing content to a creator of original movies and series, with some of the former getting wide theatrical release ahead of their online premieres – but according to the people who oversee those projects, the mission statement has been the same from the start.

“At the time we first launched, we could only explore the genre through catalogue licensing,” explains VP of Programming Sam Zimmerman. “Now [our mission statement] has become, ‘How do we explore [the genre] through new filmmaking voices and new films?’ But even in our acquisitions, that mission has stayed true, because some of what we have picked up has been new restorations of films that were once lost, were never properly released or hadn't been in circulation.”

Key examples include George A. Romero's previously lost public service short *The Amusement Park*, and the original *Nightwatch* reality TV series, which hadn't been available on streaming for many years.



**“A glorious home for weird weirdos and their weird art, Shudder has made it its business model to encourage its filmmakers to go as far out as their comfort zones allow.”**

**- MARK DUPLASS  
(THE CREEP TAPES)**

Shudder's initial approach of carefully curated and categorized content was evident from the start, but 2016 saw the streamer get a substantial severed leg up on the competition when the catalogue titles became supplemented with Exclusives and then Originals making powerful debuts.

Among the exclusives that year were Rob



**Foreign Frights:** Among Shudder's breakout international acquisitions are Coralie Fargeat's daring French debut *Revenge* (top) and Argentinian filmmaker Demián Rugna's *Terrified*.

Zombie's crowdfunded *31* and Álex de la Iglesia's highly anticipated return to the genre, *Witching and Bitching*, followed early in 2017 by Kôji Shiraishi's much-awaited J-horror matchup *Sadako vs. Kayako*. But beyond these bangers from established filmmakers, Shudder also introduced French filmmaker Coralie Fargeat (you might have heard of her latest, *The Substance*) to a wide viewership by making her savage shocker *Revenge* one of its very first Originals.

“That was a standout for me,” recalls Emily Gotto, Shudder's SVP of Acquisitions and Production, who came from working at international sales agent Protagonist Pictures. “*Revenge* was such a breath of fresh air for me; having crossed over into a very specific focus on horror, and acquiring Coralie's film on promo from Charades out of the Cannes market in 2017 was a highlight of that year.”

Real horror fans know that some of the best stuff the genre has to offer comes in many

tongues, and among Shudder's smart decisions has been to introduce English-speaking viewers to the terrors the international horror scene has to offer. An early highlight was the 2019 Shudder debut of *Tigers Are Not Afraid*, a much-acclaimed mix of coming-of-age story, magical fantasy, and stark horror by Mexican filmmaker Issa López, who went on to triumph last year with HBO's *True Detective: Night Country*. Shudder also provided a home for Indonesia's Joko Anwar, handling *Satan's Slaves* (2018), *Impetigore* (2020), *Satan's Slaves: Communion* (2022), and *Grave Torture* (2024), as well as Kimo Stamboel's *The Queen of Black Magic* (2021), which Anwar scripted. And nearly two years after Shin'ichirô Ueda's *One Cut of the Dead* opened in Japan in 2017, American viewers finally got to experience the endlessly clever and hilarious zombie comedy via the streaming service.

It was also Shudder that first gave Argentina's Demián Rugna a wide showcase by carrying his





**"Happy birthday, Shudder! Thanks for giving a home to *The Last Drive-In* and letting me be as weird as I want but, more importantly, thanks for being a place for horrorhounds to congregate during the years when horror was transitioning from something Hollywood was ashamed of to a genre that Hollywood can't live without."**

**- JOE BOB BRIGGS (*THE LAST DRIVE-IN WITH JOE BOB BRIGGS*)**

very accurately titled *Terrified* in 2018, which led to them fully financing his even more frightening *When Evil Lurks* in 2023. Shudder first began this leap from acquisitions to its own productions with Graham Reznick's series *Deadwax* in 2018 and then a *Creepshow* reboot the following year. Expanding on a popular IP (George A. Romero's 1982 hit feature), the anthology series employed an array of experienced genre talent behind the camera — including makeup effects veteran turned filmmaker Greg Nicotero as a producer and showrunner — and ran for four seasons.

"*Creepshow* will always be really special because it reignited this property that many horror fans know and love, including myself," says Zimmerman. "Getting to work directly with Greg Nicotero, meeting him and understanding what drives him, I found out how kind and driven and passionate he is as a horror fan. He felt like the perfect person to work with, because he is still connected to the legacy of the genre and its masters, and has not lost an ounce of that enthusiasm."

Another jewel in Shudder's crown happened right when horror fans needed it most: released in July 2020, in the midst of the worst of the pandemic, British filmmaker Rob Savage's *Host* was an instant genre

sensation. The "screenlife" chiller that depicts a group of friends on Zoom as they face the deadly aftermath of an online seance was not only an astonishingly effective microbudget debut for Savage, but it tapped directly into the anxieties the world was feeling that year. Since then, Savage has gone on to the big leagues, directing *The Boogeyman* in 2023 for 20th Century Studios, but Zimmerman remembers the intimacy of *Host*'s development being critical to the film hitting at just the right time.

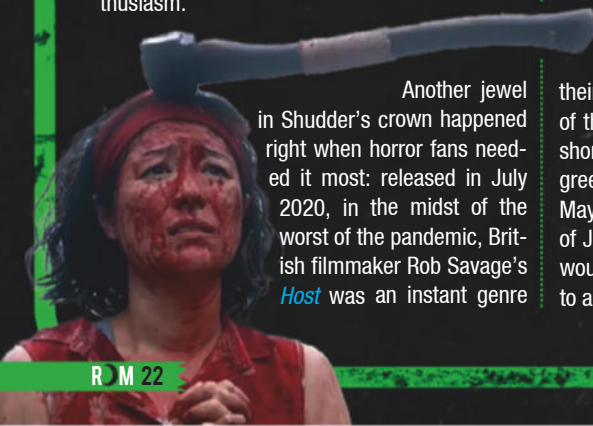
"Watching Rob and [*Host* co-writers] Jed [Shepherd] and Gemma [Hurley] and their whole team make this movie that was so of the moment in that period of time, in such a short window, was incredible," he recalls. "They greenlit *Host*, I believe, at the beginning or mid-May of 2020 and it was on Shudder at the end of July. And it felt like any earlier or any later, it would have missed being as significant as it was to all of us and how we were feeling."

Apart from COVID's deadly reign, the summer of 2020 was a time of social reckoning: the coals of #metoo were still hot when George Floyd's murder spurred the Black Lives Matter movement, and Shudder didn't ignore the urgent call for inclusion. As Shudder branched out from features and scripted series to programming such as *The Last Drive-In with Joe Bob Briggs*, *Cursed Films*, and *Horror's Greatest*, it also brought in more diverse voices with cultural examinations like *Horror Noire: A History of Black Horror*, *Queer for Fear: The History of Queer Horror*, and the reality competition show *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula* (which the streamer picked up in 2020).

Eventually, Shudder began teaming up with AMC stablemates IFC Films and RLJE Films to give theatrical play to some of their titles; not the handful of "select theatres" so many movies receive these days, but breaks in the 700-to-1500-theatre range over the last couple of



**Scary Sanctuary:** Shudder answered COVID's call for fright flicks at home with the premiere of Rob Savage's quarantine chiller *Host* (top) and the fourth film of the *W/H/S* found-footage anthology series, *W/H/S/94*.





BACK FROM THE GRAVE UNDER ALL-NEW MANAGEMENT, **SCREAM TV** RESURRECTS THE JOYS OF STREAMING TELEVISION FOR HORROR FANS

# SCREAM AGAIN

BY **ANDREA SUBISSATI**

**W**hile we've long mourned the days of video stores and VHS boxes, less lamented is the cable TV era, where fright flicks were relegated to late hours (and oftentimes, censored for content) – but it was still a gateway to the genre for many a monster kid. Sure, modern on-demand streaming services offer more convenience, but the saturated market of subscription services have sent prices soaring and pushed consumers to diversify their selections with more and more apps, in addition to other more psychological costs that are taking their toll on our collective psyche, like hours of mindless scrolling and menu fatigue.

**"PEOPLE DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND [THE GENRE], AND A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE AFRAID OF IT."**

— **SCREAM TV CO-FOUNDER CORINNE FERGUSON**

"I grew up watching cable television, I love TV," says Corinne Ferguson, co-founder of Scream TV – a free advertising-supported streaming television (FAST channel), where audiences can experience the convenience of anytime/anywhere programming without the cable bill.

"[I have] very fond memories of scheduled programming, planning my time around that.

I've got so many subscriptions [now], and I've got to go everywhere to find the different films and TV shows that I really like that I wanted to rewatch. So, crazy as we are, we [decided to] do something about that. We said, 'Why don't we create a horror channel?'"

The "we" consists of herself, David Bond, and Chris Wright, who had previously worked together on 2018's *Extremity* (co-produced by Ferguson and Bond, with Wright working as DIT). Between Bond's chops in the industry, having produced *Huesera: The Bone Woman* and *Antrum: The Deadliest Film Ever Made*, and Wright's background in broadcast (Canada's Wild TV), the threesome had what it took to launch the all-horror FAST channel NYX TV in the UK (under Freeview and Channelbox providers) back in 2022. Their expansion to North American platforms took a little longer because they sought the rights to call it Scream TV – a traditional cable channel that had been rebranded to Dusk prior to shuttering in 2012.

"I like to study the past to learn from it, and I'll be honest with you: I think it was because it was wrapped up in a big behemoth media company," says Ferguson of the original station's closure. "People don't really understand [the genre], and a lot of people are afraid of it."

But times have changed in the past decade, both culturally and technologically, and Ferguson is convinced that Scream TV 2.0 won't have to contend with many of the concerns that a free-to-watch horror station faced before. Chief among those challenges was (and remains)

advertising, which is critical for FAST channels to remain free. Ferguson is confident, however, that savvy businesses are less spooked by spooky programming in 2025 than they were before.

"There's [horror] coffee shops, there's horror theme parks... you name it," she points out, adding that even non-traditional advertisers, like Doritos or McDonald's, are wising up to the genre's vast appeal. "Who doesn't need snacks when they're watching horror movies? Like, come on!"

At the end of the day, Ferguson is less interested in joining a competition for horror fans' eyeballs than offering those fans somewhere to land when they can't decide between Fulci or Fessenden on a given Friday night. The current lineup also includes commentary segments, including "FrightFest Saturday Scares" from film critic Alan Jones, co-curator of the FrightFest genre festival, "Dark Rewind" hosted by indie scream queen August Kyss, and Chris Alexander's "Sinister Cinema." Ferguson's vision for Scream TV is a station you'll put on and leave on all day, that will surprise you with an old favourite, a new release, or the underground indie gem you never knew you needed to see.

"Like we say, lean back and let us entertain you," she says. "You don't have to make any decisions! You don't have to think like, 'Oh, what do I feel like tonight? Zombies, monsters, vampires?' Let us entertain you and just tune in."

Look for Scream TV on DistroTV via iOS, Apple TV, Roku, Android, and Google devices. 🍿





**"Shudder not only curates iconic chills but also champions indie horror filmmakers, providing a vital platform for fresh voices to share their unique visions in a genre that thrives on creativity and innovation."**

**- DRACMORDA BOULET (THE BOULET BROTHERS' DRAGULA)**



**"Celebrating ten years of Shudder is like raising a glass to the beautifully macabre."**

**- SWANTHULA BOULET (THE BOULET BROTHERS' DRAGULA)**

years. These have included Kyle Edward Ball's *Skinamarink* (which Shudder/IFC snapped up after pirated versions went viral), Chris Nash's *In a Violent Nature*, Damian Mc Carthy's *Oddity*, and the aforementioned *When Evil Lurks*. The game-changer, however, was 2023's *Late Night with the Devil*; after a raucously received festival run, Colin and Cameron Cairnes' talk-show-terror opus hit U.S./Canadian screens in March of last year, taking in \$10 million and announcing Shudder/IFC as theatrical players to be reckoned with.

"That movie is such a crowd-pleaser that it felt so right to be theatrically driven," Zimmerman says. "But the movie's style and presentation are very audacious, so even at our widest and most successful, we're sticking true to what we believe Shudder is."

It should be pointed out that if one of their titles bypasses the big screen and goes straight to the streamer, that doesn't mean the team thinks any less of it. A good example is French filmmaker Sébastien Vaniček's killer-spider opus *Infested*,

which debuted on Shudder in April 2024 following raves from its festival tour.

"Something that's very important for us to convey to the world is that theatrical doesn't denote quality in terms of one movie being better than the other," explains Zimmerman. "Some of our biggest films of the year, like the *V/H/S* franchise, go directly to Shudder, because it's about strategy, and making sure we have appointment viewing and an exciting place for the audience to gather. *Infested* felt like that; it was a significant word-of-mouth film, very successful at festivals, and we wanted people to direct themselves to Shudder to come see this cool new voice in horror, who's going on to do a new *Evil Dead*. Also, there's something to be said for the idea that the place you most often see spiders is in your house!"

Among the highlights of Shudder's theatrical 2025 schedule are Emilie Blichfeldt's *The Ugly Stepsister* and Eli Craig's *Clown in a Cornfield*. The former is a body-horror variation on the Cinderella story that won raves from its Sundance Film Festival premiere in January, and the latter (which goes into wide release May 9) is adapted from Adam Cesare's popular young adult novel about a small town in which local business mascot Frendo the Clown comes to murderous life. One of the most exciting titles headed for a streaming-only debut is *Reflection in a Dead Diamond*, the latest genre homage from the acclaimed duo Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani (*Amer*, *The Strange Color of Your Body's Tears*), which draws influence from both *giallo* thrillers and European spy actioners.

"We're not a place that closes ourselves off to subgenres or ideas," Zimmerman says. "To us, it's about how it's presented and what those approaches are. *Oddity* is an almost traditionally scary film, but executed so perfectly, while *In a Violent Nature* is a unique presentation of a slasher film. Those movies are radically different, but it was the filmmakers' perspectives that excited us."

"We don't feel that we should be the gatekeepers of people's creativity," adds Gotto.

And like many a fright factory, Shudder is looking to build sustainable franchises. They've already had great success with the *V/H/S* series of anthology features, having come aboard with the fourth entry, *V/H/S/94* (2021), and continued with *V/H/S/99* (2022), *V/H/S/85* (2023), and *V/H/S/Beyond* (2024).

(Involvement in these omnibus movies can be a stepping stone to feature collaboration later; after contributing the "Storm Drain" segment to *V/H/S/94*, for example, Chloe Okuno saw her feature debut *Watcher* picked up by Shudder/IFC and given a release in more than 750 theatres.) Currently in the works is *In a Violent Nature 2*, with Nash returning to tell the further story of the murderous, implacable Johnny.

"We're looking forward to going into production on that," Gotto says. "What the story is has to remain under wraps, but we're all very excited about it."

"We always aim to release things that are absolutely frightening," adds Zimmerman. "Anytime we find that, anywhere along the scale from classically spooky to psychologically and deeply unnerving, that's what we want to achieve." 🧛





## THE BAPHOMET SEANCE: THE SCARIEST MOVIE EVER MADE?



Dare you enter the darkness? "The Baphomet Seance"—a film so cursed, so wretched, so consumed by the very essence of evil, it defies description. Created in 1983, this haunting cinematic masterpiece holds a sinister reputation that only grows with time. Banned immediately upon release, it was deemed too dangerous, too unsettling for human minds to comprehend.

People whispered its name in fear, its story was shared in hushed tones. But even now, after more than four decades, its legacy lingers. "The Baphomet Seance" was never simply a film; it was an invitation. An invitation to something far darker than anyone could imagine.

Set against the backdrop of the Satanic Panic, when fear and paranoia gripped the minds of the masses, the film tells a tale that should never have been told. A group of unsuspecting individuals, drawn together by the promise of a harmless seance, unwittingly awaken something ancient and malevolent. Baphomet—an entity whispered about in dark, forbidden circles—rises from the depths, a creature of shadow and flame, its power unimaginable. As they dabble with forces beyond comprehension, they quickly discover that they have opened a door they close.

From the moment the film was released, a wave of strange occurrences followed. Viewers, curious and unwitting, soon found themselves subjected to nightmarish phenomena. It was as if the boundaries between the movie and reality had blurred, like some ancient veil had been lifted. Police reports from across the country flooded in, detailing bizarre and terrifying events linked to the film. Investigators were stunned. How could a movie, just a flicker of light and sound, provoke such madness? Demonic interference was suspected. Shadowy figures were seen lurking in homes. Disappearances began. People would watch the film, and then... vanish. Families were torn apart. Friends turned on one another in fits of rage, their eyes glowing with a malevolent hunger. Authorities were helpless. In one particularly chilling incident, a family who had watched the film was found in a state of frozen horror. Catatonic. But it was worse than that. One member of the family—an innocent child—was said to speak in an ancient tongue.

Words no living human should ever have known. Police, unable to comprehend the situation, could only watch in terror as the family was removed from their home.



Yet no explanation was ever found for their condition. Had they truly been touched by something beyond the physical world? Or had they glimpsed a reality so horrific that their minds had simply shattered in fear?

The events surrounding "The Baphomet Seance" caused a stir that could not be ignored. The film was immediately pulled from theaters. Copies were seized and burned. Theaters that had shown the movie were razed. The powers that be knew that this was no ordinary horror film—it was something far more dangerous. Rumors spread that the film's creators had dabbled in the occult, perhaps even inviting the demon Baphomet into their lives. Were these simply rumors, or had they, too, opened a door to something they could never close?

Now, after more than forty years of silence, "The Baphomet Seance" is set to be re-released to the public. The question hangs heavy in the air: Why? Why bring this cursed film back into the world? The answer is simple. Some things never stay buried. They wait. And now, the door is wide open again.

The movie's return is no accident. Those who have waited for this moment—some out of sheer morbid curiosity, others driven by something darker—are about to find out what lies beyond the veil. Is it just a movie, a simple tale of horror? Or is it a warning, a dire prophecy, a ritual you cannot unsee once you've witnessed it? There are those who believe the film will lead to an awakening, an unraveling of the very fabric of reality. Will you be one of them? Will you dare to face what comes through when Baphomet calls?

The air is thick with the stench of fear. Something is coming. Something is waiting. And it is hungry. The question remains: Can you withstand it? Will you come to the seance? Or will you turn away, forever haunted by the knowledge that you missed your chance to peer into the abyss?



Visit [www.TheBaphometSeance.com](http://www.TheBaphometSeance.com), if you dare. You may think you're safe. But if you've been touched by the curse of this film, you'll soon realize that no one is ever truly free from the grasp of Baphomet. *The seance is waiting. Come closer, if you dare.*



OUT APRIL 29 FROM DEL REY, CHUCK WENDIG'S  
THE STAIRCASE IN THE WOODS IS A JOURNEY TO  
SOMEPLACE STRANGE AND FRIGHTENING

# STEP INTO DARKNESS

BY OWEN WILLIAMS

As much as I haven't always written horror, I've also always written horror," says author Chuck Wendig, and if you've been following his winding professional career, from screenwriting to Marvel comics to books in the expanded *Star Wars* universe, you'd instantly get what he means by that. Wendig began his career as a writer of pen-and-paper roleplaying games, and he's written prolifically for multiple age groups and in various genres. And although publishers have slapped his work with buzzy labels such as "urban fantasy" and "supernatural suspense" in recent years, there's been no mistaking him as a horror author of considerable note – and he believes his latest, *The Staircase in the Woods*, to be his darkest work yet.

Out April 29 from Del Rey, the book's title and central hook refer to a familiar urban legend popularized over the last decade or so by creepypastas and Reddit deep cuts. One spooky tall-tale-telling Redditor in 2015, claiming to be a Search and Rescue Officer for the U.S. Forest Service, posted that "on just about every case where we're really far into the wilderness... at some point we'll find a staircase." And if a staircase to nothing in the middle of the woods wasn't strange enough, locals would often warn against

investigating them any further: "I was told, very emphatically, that I should never go near any of them."

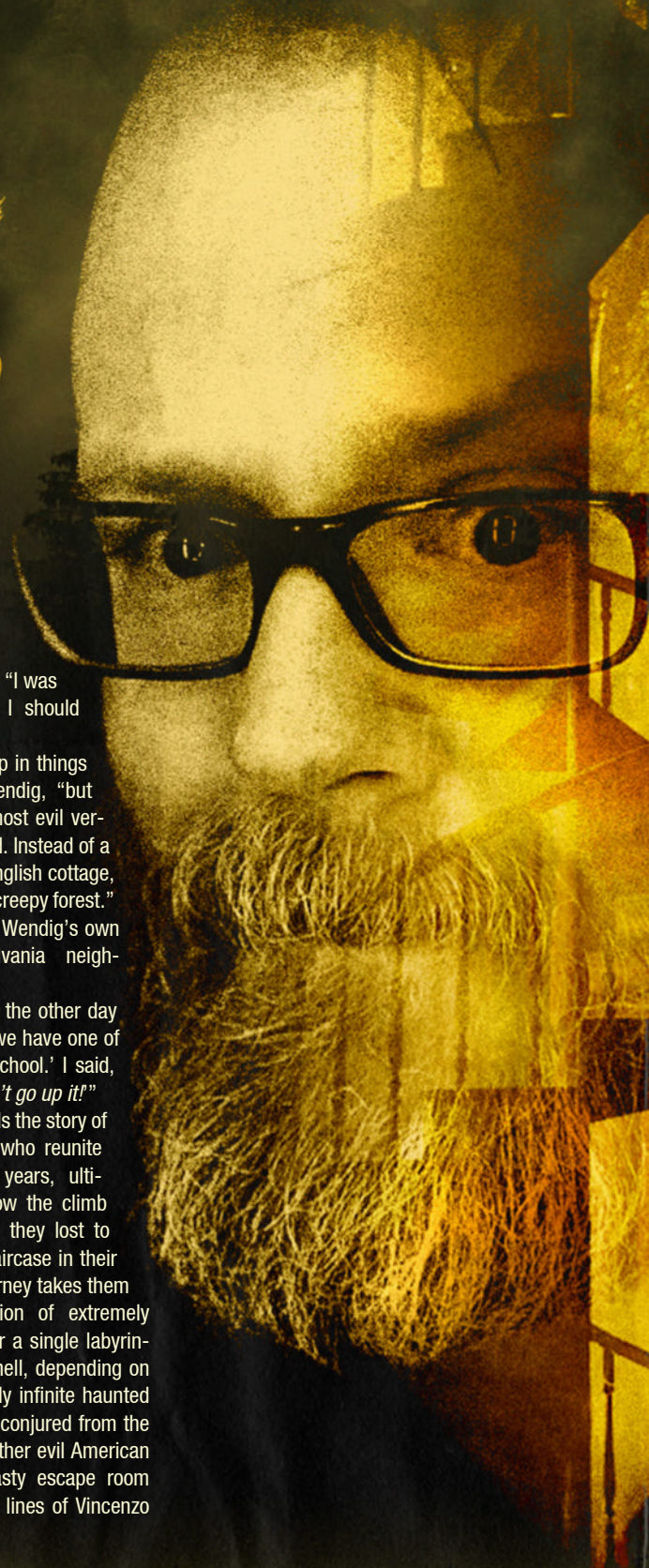
"[Random staircases] pop up in things like *Fortean Times*," says Wendig, "but it's a real phenomenon, the most evil version of Narnia that you can find. Instead of a beautiful old wardrobe in an English cottage, it's no, there's a staircase in a creepy forest."

There's even an example in Wendig's own rural Pennsylvania neighbourhood.


"My kid just the other day was like, 'Oh we have one of those at our school.' I said, 'Oh cool – *don't go up it!*'"

The book tells the story of a peer group who reunite after 30-odd years, ultimately to follow the climb of Matty, who they lost to just such a staircase in their youth. The journey takes them to a succession of extremely dark places, or a single labyrinthine, liminal hell, depending on

your perspective: an apparently infinite haunted house dimension haphazardly conjured from the psychic residue of countless other evil American homes, like a particularly nasty escape room constructed along the shifting lines of Vincenzo Natali's *Cube*.







## "IT'S A REAL PHENOMENON, THE MOST EVIL VERSION OF NARNIA THAT YOU CAN FIND."

— AUTHOR CHUCK WENDIG

As a sort of dungeon-crawl through loops of repeating awfulness, *The Staircase in the Woods* showcases not only Wendig's horror chops but his heritage as a game designer. There's a hopeful note in that, as with any game, there's a way through and out if only you can find it, but the book still feels like a possible metaphor for America and the present-day news cycle — a loop of doomscrolling dread.

"I didn't actually intend that," says the author, "but yes, that vibe works for the book and it certainly feels like our current iteration of existing in the world and online. But I don't know if it's even worth talking about metaphors for America right now. It's just a dumpster fire. Inasmuch as there are some references to politics [in the book], I think it's more about the things we lose growing up, and what it's like to be damaged by those losses and traumas over time. And it's definitely saying something about families and houses and what those houses get to see."

There are prosaic reasons why these staircases do genuinely exist, of course. People build structures and houses in the woods, and those structures gradually return to nature when abandoned, but the staircases, as a necessarily stable part of the original building, remain standing. Yet, logic can't quite dispel the uncanny feeling they generate when someone stumbles upon them. Freud talked about the *unheimlich*: instances of uncomfort-

able oddness where "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind has become alienated" through appearing in an odd context. Surrealist artists loved the idea of these irrational juxtapositions, like René Magritte's apple-faced "The Son of Man" or the train in the fireplace of "Time Transfixed." Staircases in the woods produce a similarly discombobulating effect.

The novel's afterword describes an encounter Wendig had on a recent book tour, where the New Hampshire locals told him there was a staircase nearby, but not in the direction he was travelling.

"Initially I was disappointed that I wouldn't be able to get to it if I was going to make my next event," he recounts now, "but it turned out it was literally along my path, and I like to imagine that it was originally in the wrong direction but then somehow it moved as if to summon me to it..."

In the book, he writes that he "saw it and got its vibe" but he noticeably doesn't mention climbing it. While clearly not autobiographical, Wendig says *The Staircase in the Woods* is certainly deeply personal, and that all the characters are him, at least to some extent. More generally, he invokes the notion of "the Gen-X friend group," though there are bleak undercurrents to that surface nostalgia; the novel's "covenant" of kids, to varying degrees, are horribly parented and in one case not parented at all.

"I'm not suggesting [modern parents] are the best now or that it always works, but to some degree most of the kids I know now seem to basically *like* their parents," he marvels, "or at least don't hate them or want to be free of them. They're much less about

running out and having *Goonies* adventures because they're not trying to flee their houses every day all the time. When we were kids, it was like, get on your bikes and get out. That's where the kids-and-bikes genre comes from — and this book is a little bit that. Our bikes were our one tool we had to escape the place we didn't want to be. And you get that freaks-and-geeks thing where everybody sort of washes up together on the same beach and it's like, 'Well, I guess we're friends now.'"

Those friendships might be lost or forgotten, but *The Staircase in the Woods* suggests that the potential is always there for them to be recovered, reforged, and reshaped. So, can the novel really be as dark as Wendig fears it is?

"It's a fine balance," he says. "Some writers like Eric LaRocca and Paul Tremblay produce some pretty bleak material and it feels really right and it works. Personally, I usually prefer at least a pyrrhic victory, if not a happy ending."

Previous gnarly Wendig tomes such as *The Book of Accidents* and *Black River Orchard* have dug deep into buried trauma and excavated dark forgotten histories (processes he casually describes as "shaking it all out and seeing what we can sift from the bones"), but even there, he muses, "I feel like the characters come through [comparatively] cleanly. There's definitely some stuff left on the altar, but *Black River Orchard* in particular is a book where evil rises and then falls again. This book isn't so clear-cut. This one's like, 'There's something out there and it's in us too...'"

Maybe he was subliminally leaning into that metaphor after all. Perhaps it crept up on him insidiously, up a mysterious flight of stairs... 🕸



IT'S BEEN TWO DECADES SINCE **MARINA DE VAN'S *IN MY SKIN*** DEVASTATED AND DELIGHTED ART HOUSE GORE FANS. NOW, HER DEBUT FEATURE PROMISES TO CUT DEEP ONCE AGAIN WITH A RESTORED RELEASE FROM SEVERIN

BY **ROCCO T. THOMPSON**

"I had an argument with my parents when they came to my apartment," breathes Marina de Van, exhaling a plume of vape as she recounts the self-harm experiences that inspired her 2002 debut directorial effort *In My Skin* (*Dans ma peau*). "There was blood everywhere — on the wood, on the ground, everywhere. I said to them, 'It's my body. I do what I want.' And they were answering, 'No, it isn't your body.'"

A crown jewel of the so-called New French Extremity movement, *In My Skin* has been somewhat scarce on home media and streaming — perhaps due to the astonishingly personal nature of its violence. Now, thanks to a brand-new restoration by Severin Films, de Van's shocking confessional body horror masterpiece is finally ready to fill a place of sticky red honour on every extreme art house horror fan's shelf.

Written, directed by, and starring de Van, *In My Skin* concerns Esther, a professional with a promising future at her marketing firm and a live-in boyfriend (*Calvaire*'s Laurent Lucas) with whom she's planning to purchase

an apartment while eyeing a big promotion. While attending a party with a couple of co-workers, Esther falls on some leftover building materials and gashes her leg. Curiously numb to the pain, she begins to obsess over the ragged wound, eventually giving in to a compulsion to dig into it with a bit of metal in her office storeroom. As Esther's preoccupation with harming her body grows

into a near-erotic fixation, she becomes increasingly isolated from her friends, colleagues, and partner despite a dawning certainty that she's getting closer to herself.

Upon its release in 2002, the then 31-year-old de Van was reluctant to accept the seemingly memoir-istic nature of her gory masterwork. The star admits to a certain caginess born of a fear that the film would be minimized if she were frank about its conception —

not merely as a psychological horror drama, but a visual testimony to something deeply felt but scarcely understood.

"I was rather theoretical about it," she remembers. "I had a whole logical explanation about the character, but

**"IT'S FASHIONABLE  
NOWADAYS TO  
ASSOCIATE WOMEN  
WITH BODY HORROR."**

— WRITER/DIRECTOR  
MARINA DE VAN



now I have forgotten my arguments. I wanted people to take my film as art, not crying about myself. Since it's been [over] twenty years and the film is still touching people, now I can afford to say, 'It's my story.'"

Though the physical mutilations Esther visits on her pliant, yielding flesh were staged using effects, de Van claims that each and every bit of what we see onscreen is based on something she had done to herself prior to her recovery.

"What was fictional was the fact that [Esther] had a guy, and that she was corporate and working in an office. The link to the body, the self-mutilation... all that was autobiographical," she says, adding that the preserved strip of epidermis that Esther lovingly tucks into her bra in the film's harrowing final minutes was not a prop. "It's my real skin, but I don't know where it is. I lost it in my apartment."

The artist can trace her struggles with self-harm and body image back to a distressingly early age ("My first self-mutilation gesture, I was three years old," she states plainly), but as expressed in the film, her desire to pick, slice, and gnaw at pieces of herself is as much a social problem as it is a personal one. Happening alongside Esther's escalating compulsion are interpersonal issues of the acutely feminine kind: an instance of sexual harassment at a work party, a promotion that her coworker and former friend is jealous of, and escalating strain on her relationship with her boyfriend who won't (or perhaps can't) see the problem for what it really is.

"It's all the social rules that I never could understand," says de Van. "When [Esther] eats at the restaurant and there is this conversation, she can't fit. She can't stand it. She doesn't understand it. She's completely lost. And so was I."

The restaurant scene she refers to is the film's most unforgettable one, wherein Esther, seated at a work dinner, suddenly perceives her own hand and forearm on the table completely detached from her. Stealthily snatching a piece of cutlery, she digs into her arm, creating bloody tracks as she tries to reestablish a connection to a body that feels fractured and foreign to her. In this moment, de Van depicts the profound isolation that's coloured her life as dissociation and disembodiment.

"For me, my body is not whole because [from my POV] I am a body without a head," she explains. "[We] see pieces: I don't see my back, I don't see my head."



**Coup de Grâce:** Marina de Van's notorious debut feature is as challenging to watch as it is impossible to forget.

More than two decades later, de Van seems to have an easier time reconstituting the disparate pieces of her being into a whole, but has struggled to outrun the long shadow cast by her directorial debut, which recently

screened at the MoMA, a rare honour for a film as violent and viscerally disturbing as it is.

"I did *In My Skin* more than twenty years ago, and for [the public], it seems that my life stopped [and] I have done nothing since," she says. "That's the only thing that bothers me sometimes."

On the contrary, since 2002, de Van has written and directed two further features,

*Don't Look*





*Back* (2009) and *Dark Touch* (2013) [see sidebar below] and, most recently, *My Nudity Means Nothing* (2019), an unvarnished, documentary essay in which a frequently naked de Van explores dating in the modern age and the renewed relationship she's found with her body in mid-life. Though difficult to find, the film is a worthwhile spiritual companion to the feminist body horror of *In My Skin* as a self-portrait of a woman who's journeyed through the hell of her own young mind and come out scarred but surviving.

For a creative who bristles at the label "horror" as applied to her work (she describes her three adult-focused features as a "matrix of anguish"), she is characteristically wry when asked whether she finds gratification in the current vogue for female-centred genre fare from her country.

"It's fashionable nowadays to associate women with body horror," she says. "[Now] we have Julia Ducournau, we have Coralie Fargeat, and [audiences] talk as if [they] created the genre in France just now. Because we never gave space to women, and now we have found a little space where they can create without bothering anyone.

"When I was younger, people expected a woman to do a small film about menopause, a small film about giving birth, a small film about abortion," she continues. "And now, today,

women are allowed to create horror [for] the mood of the time. If the [interest in my film] can help people realize that the genre wasn't born a few years ago, well, that's good."

Still, de Van recognizes that *In My Skin*'s long life is due to the way it touches people wrestling with similar issues, something that dredged up more complex feelings than pride.

## "THE SELF-MUTILATION... ALL THAT WAS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL."

— WRITER/DIRECTOR

MARINA DE VAN

"[Upon release] I had several people telling me they recognized their anguish, their fears in my movie, and that that was a relief for them," she recalls. "But I also received a letter [from a woman] saying that after seeing my movie, she went back to cutting herself again. I did everything I could to show that was not a solution, to show that, at the end, [Esther's] not in some good place, she's in the worst place possible.

But nonetheless, I received this letter, and [all] I thought is, 'It's not my fault.'"

Interestingly, *In My Skin* did exorcise some of the filmmaker's own demons: de Van herself has not been able to engage in self-harm since making the movie, stating that she would feel like a caricature or a parody of her own work.

"I'm not able to cut at all [anymore] because it hurts!" she says simply. "I didn't remember the pain. I don't see the point to suffer [any longer]."

And while she isn't especially comfortable speaking on *In My Skin*'s contemporary relevance in the foreign land of North America, it's difficult to deny that the film has more resonance than ever before when attacks on bodily autonomy, from abortion rights to the ability for trans individuals to change their gender markers, are currently undergoing a full-fledged assault. As she has always done with *In My Skin* and the rest of her body of work, de Van seeks to shed light on our complex and maddening physical forms as something independent and beyond control, from within or without.

"When I was young, I was fighting to recover a body that had been stolen by my parents; I wanted to be the owner of my body," she says. "I could do anything I wanted, [but] the feeling of not being whole? It doesn't disappear." ❤️

## FOLLOWING THE UNDERGROUND SUCCESS OF *IN MY SKIN*, MARINA DE VAN HAS BEEN DECONSTRUCTING THE BODY HORROR GENRE EVER SINCE



BY ROCCO T. THOMPSON

Though markedly less gruesome than *In My Skin*, de Van's subsequent horror features continue her obsession with the body as a stranger with its own secret intelligence.

Sophie Marceau stars in 2009's *Don't Look Back* (*Ne te retourne pas*) as Jeanne, a novelist who, upon noticing that her home has been rearranged despite her family's protestations to the contrary,

begins to perceive herself physically transforming into another woman altogether, played by Monica Bellucci.

Unfolding as a *Persone*-esque rumination on the fluid borders of personal identity, the film shows the ways in which trauma and its expressions are often somatic rather than cerebral, an idea explored with even blunter, more naked veracity in de Van's English-language debut, *Dark Touch* (2013).

Set in a small Irish community, eleven-year-old Niamh (Missy Keating) asserts that her house keeps "coming alive," much to

the chagrin of her parents, who claim that the bruises and scars that decorate her flesh are self-induced. After the mysterious deaths of her mother, father, and infant brother, Niamh is taken in by the concerned couple next door, who are soon chilled to discover that the same supernatural occurrences that plagued Niamh's family home have moved in with her. *Dark Touch* trades the corporeal frights of de Van's previous efforts for supernatural shocks, but still roots its horror in the body and its uncanny ability to remember and act out what our conscious minds would rather forget.

De Van is fond of saying, "We don't really know what our bodies are doing," and through her three narrative horror features, she attempts not to control the uncontrollable, but find an equilibrium between the psychic and the physical; an embodied understanding that who we are (or tell ourselves we are) is a truth as corporeal as it is abstract. 🖤



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**FACE OF  
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*Presenting*

**ELVIA & HODDER**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GRACIE HAGEN

Hair & Makeup: Let's Gogh Paint! Julie Hassett and Hannah Schenck  
Location: Ghost Corps Office at Sony Pictures Studio









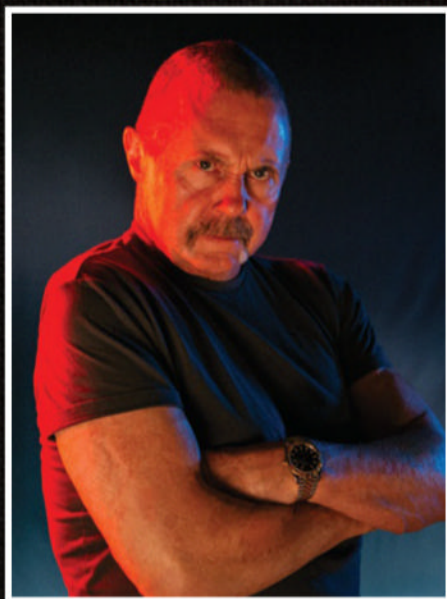
LEADING LADY

## ELVIA

*"The darkness captivates me because it can be chilling, thrilling, and even strangely beautiful."*

Elvia's beloved mother, who shares the same name, introduced her to horror at a young age, sparking fond memories of laughing together through some of the most terrifying movies ever made. Since creating home horror movies with her siblings as a child, Elvia has worked on short films and aspires to become a writer/director.

@elviasusanoficial @canelas.producciones

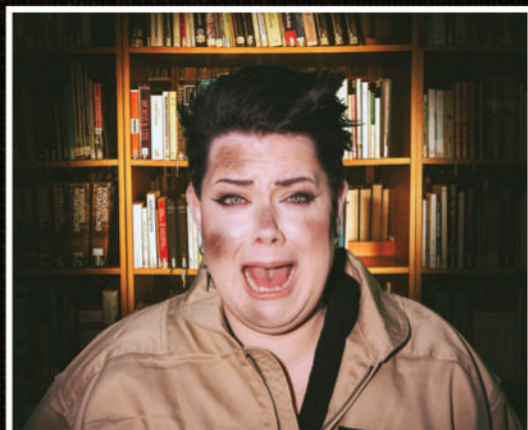


Sydney Cisco Photography

SPECIAL GUEST

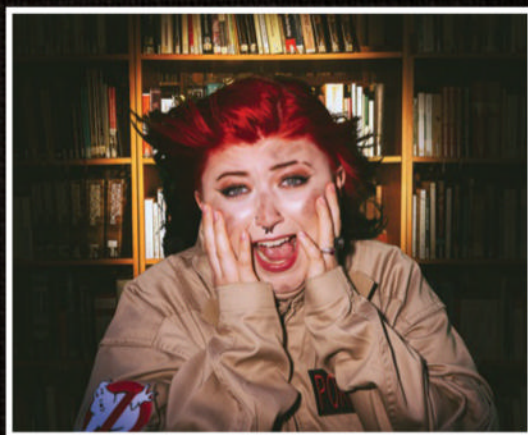
## KANE HODDER

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### DANIEL LIENDO



# CINEMACABRE

FILM + DVD + REISSUES

## STAMP OF APPROVAL

### DEAD MAIL

Starring Sterling Macer Jr., John Fleck and Susan Priver  
Written and directed by Joe DeBoer and Kyle McConaghy  
Shudder

*Dead Mail* begins with a grabber of an opening scene, then spends a good deal of its running time showing what led its two characters to that point. Not the least of the movie's many achievements is that it keeps us engrossed in this narrative even though we know where it's heading.

Writer/directors Joe DeBoer and Kyle McConaghy set up an engaging sense of community among their small-town characters, including Bess (Susan Priver) and Ann (Micki Jackson), who work in the local post office's "Mail Sortation Room." Among their tasks is to separate "dead letters" and other items of unclear destination, and pass them on to Jasper (Tomas Boykin), an older employee who's got a real knack for figuring out where they should go. He's established as a kind of hero, helping to forge connections between people that might otherwise have been lost, with the help of Renée (Nick Heyman), a European hacker with whom Jasper communicates over the phone.

All these people are given distinctive person-

alities that make the first portion of *Dead Mail* lively and most entertaining – and we haven't even gotten to the horror part, involving keyboard engineer Josh (Sterling Macer Jr.) and Trent (John Fleck), the synthesizer enthusiast who becomes his patron. Not much should be said about what transpires here, since part of the fun of *Dead Mail* lies in watching the story unfold, surprising us and keeping us in suspense

as it lays out its puzzle pieces and snaps them into place. The very well-crafted film elicits a slow-brewing tension from the scenes between Macer and Fleck, both of whom are excellent. By the end, when *Dead Mail* catches back up to its beginning and takes us beyond, DeBoer and McConaghy have us in the palms of their hands, anxious to see how their tale will be resolved – and fearful

that it might not conclude well for some of its characters.

MICHAEL GINGOLD

## STAY HUNGRY

### IT FEEDS

Starring Ashley Greene, Ellie O'Brien and Juno Rinaldi  
Written and directed by Chad Archibald  
Black Fawn Films

Therapy comes in many forms, and not all techniques are covered by a post-graduate degree in psychology. Case in point: clairvoyant widow Cynthia (Ashley Greene, *Twilight*) who, assisted by her apprentice/daughter Jordan (Ellie O'Brien), treats clients whose problems are more demonic than is normally covered in the DSM by entering their subconscious and confronting repressed beasts. But when a very distressed young Riley (Shayelin Martin) comes to the door, Cynthia refuses to treat her – a fact that's a-okay with her dad, Randall (Shawn Ashmore, *Frozen*), who doesn't go for all that psychobabble stuff anyway. However, Jordan's heart goes out to the girl and her amateur detective work unravels the existence of a ravenous demon that feeds off its victims.

There are several narrative themes running along the tight 90-minute runtime of *It Feeds*: the corrosive nature of trauma, the need to protect oneself in order to protect others, and whether psychological pain is something that can be vanquished or just managed. The personification (demonification?) of that trauma is quick to show its face, but its malevolence is best depicted in





the mindscape sequences, where twining vines and spooky little girls conjure effective (if classic) nightmares. Cynthia's friend/kooky client Agatha (Juno Rinaldi) provides some comedy to the proceedings, as the film culminates into an undoubtedly *Cell*-inspired showdown between the inky nightmare demon and the gothed-out mom-and-daughter team.

Overall, this latest from Black Fawn is undoubtedly its best yet and will likely be the hit that puts the indie Canadian label on the map.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

## ADDRESS NOT FOUND

### 825 FOREST ROAD

Starring Elizabeth Vermilyea, Kathryn Miller and Joe Falcone  
Written and directed by Stephen Cognetti  
Shudder



After a car crash kills their mother, Chuck (Joe Falcone) and his wife Maria (Elizabeth Vermilyea) take in his traumatized adult sister Isabelle (Kathryn Miller) and move to Ashland Falls hoping to start over. But the town harbours a secret: a horrible event in the distant past still haunts its

residents. Could the house at 825 Forest Road, which doesn't exist on any map, hold the key to stopping the supernatural violence that has plagued Ashland Falls for generations?

Writer/director Stephen Cognetti made a name with the *Hell House LLC* movies, but *825 Forest Road* marks the first time he's stepped outside of found footage. While that format allows one to wring horror out of small moments (like a door moving on its own or a shadowy figure in the background), here it ends up feeling like the director is pulling back before delivering any scares. The vengeful ghost of Ashland Falls lurks behind the characters, getting closer and closer before... moving on to the next scene without any payoff. The story is divided into chapters that all start with Chuck, Maria, and Isabelle's first arrival; following their stories in parallel could have been an interesting narrative device, but hitting "reset" every time we change points of view works against the escalating tension.

The ideas here will be familiar to horror fans – a community unable to escape its monstrous past worked as the basis for *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, and creepy old lady ghosts have popped up everywhere from *Insidious* to *Crimson Peak* – but they never come together in a satisfying way in *825 Forest Road*. The *Hell House LLC* films prove that Cognetti knows how to take us on a journey into horror, but outside of found footage he'll need more than an address to reach his destination.

MAGILL FOOTE

## GO FOR WOKE

### WAKE UP

Starring Turlough Convery, Benny O. Arthur and Jacqueline Moré  
Directed by Anouk Whissell, Yoannn-Karl Whissell and François Simard  
Written by Alberto Marini and Martin Soudan  
Blue Fox Entertainment

It's gotta be tough making a modern movie in the age of cellphones. Take the new survivalist thriller *Wake Up* by beloved Montreal filmmakers RKSS (*Turbo Kid*, *Summer of 84*). Its tidy set-up sees six young eco activists secret themselves inside an Ikea-style big box store overnight to vandalize it but are hunted down by a crazy security guard. The flimflammy used to explain away their lack of cellphone service is just that – flimflammy – but it's to the credit of co-directors Anouk Whissell, Yoannn-Karl Whissell, and François Simard that I'm willing to overlook this egregious plot contrivance and heartily recommend *Wake Up* as a lean and very mean killing machine.

Credit much of that suspension of disbelief to the young cast, who manage to breathe life into their hastily sketched-out characters before they breathe their last. Chief among them is newcomer Jacqueline Moré as Yasmin, the most committed and capable of the activists, and Irish actor Turlough Convery (*Saint Maud*) as Kevin, a skilled hunter whose inability to deal with the public is what lands him and his older brother Jack (Aidan O'Hare) on the night shift in the first place. Convery convincingly plays Kevin as a socially inept loner who is only good at intimidating and finally killing people.

The RKSS team should also be congratulated for ably adapting [REC] producer Alberto Marini's script which, beyond the cellphone debacle, gives his characters enough smarts to at least sometimes avoid Kevin's clever traps, but is still nihilistic enough that they have little chance of surviving them. The criticisms of voracious capitalism and naive activism are subtle but there, making *Wake Up* both woke and go-for-broke.

SEAN PLUMMER



who encounters an America built on decaying suburbs, bullying bosses, and psychopaths bent on trashing nice middle-class homes.

Set in an indeterminate time (although pay-phones still work and Obama's on TV), *Invader* begins as young Ana (Vero Maynez, in her film debut) arrives from an unnamed country to visit her cousin Camila. Things start to go wrong right away: the bus arrives at 4:30 a.m., Camila's not answering her phone, and Ana has to flee a taxi driver who demands she get in his cab. She makes the eight-kilometre trek to her cousin's house on foot, dragging her luggage through a massive trash-ridden, burned-out suburban hellscape. She reaches her destination only to find no one answering and her cousin's car abandoned, but she gets help from one of Camila's co-workers, Carlo (Colin Huerta). They enter the house only to find it trashed and stumble across Camila bound in the basement just as the killer returns to the house, leading to a fast and frantic final act.

Clocking in at just 70 minutes, *Invader* dispenses with such niceties as backstory or motivation to keep the action – and the camera – moving. Cinematographer Mac Fiskien shot most of the film handheld and tracking with the characters, adding considerably to the tension. Also upping the scares is Shawn Duffy's sound design, which effectively mixes howling winds, thrash metal, and newscasts. Maynez and Huerta make for sympathetic, believable leads, performing partly in English and partly in (subtitled) Spanish. Producer Joe Swanberg plays the title role, his everyman features driving home *Invader's* depiction of a violently dysfunctional America.

LISA MORTON



## SNUFF FOR DUMMIES

### BLOODY AXE WOUND

Starring Sari Arambulo, Billy Burke and Molly Brown  
Written and directed by Matthew John Lawrence  
Shudder

"Makes no sense" and "preposterous" are charges we frequently hear levelled at horror films. Sometimes they have merit; sometimes they're simply evidence that the person making the charges is too pedantic and too much of a dullard to buy into the supernatural or grotesque (while simultaneously having no issues with hobbits or Klingons). But on this occasion, *Wretched Reader*, I myself am hurling said same brickbats – unreservedly – at young adult horror-comedy *Bloody Axe Wound* on the grounds that its entire basic premise makes no sense. That it is otherwise well-directed and features decent production values and a superb cast makes it an uncon-

## HOME OF THE CRAZED

### INVADER

Starring Vero Maynez, Colin Huerta and Sanjay Choudrey  
Written and directed by Mickey Keating  
Doppelgänger Releasing

*Invader* is a compact, taut thriller that flips a current national conversation on its ear, giving us a story of a traveller from another country



scionable waste of resources.

The top rentals at an unremarkable small-town New Jersey video store are a low-rent slasher film series that no one seems to realize features actual murders committed by the store's hideously disfigured owner (Billy Burke, *Lights Out*). Somehow, none of the customers connect the scores of local disappearances to the murders onscreen, but that's not even the biggest problem here. Nope, it's that we're not supposed to ask who's shooting the films when we witness multiple slashings, guttings, dismemberings, and other gory fuckeries happening without so much as a cameraman hanging around.

Then we meet the killer/video store owner's teenage daughter (the ultra-impressive Sari Arambulo), whose sole ambition is to take over for dear old Dad as old age and failing health threaten to derail his enterprise. So, she starts hanging around the local high school to scout some new victims, only to fall head-over-adolescent-heels in love with the first cool girl she meets (Molly Brown) and before you can say "heartfelt coming-of-age romantic subplot," well, we've got one. Toss in some ancillary characters (one of whom, inexplicably, is in on the scheme while the others aren't) and we tumble headlong toward an ending that makes no sense, but neither do the beginning or middle so, like, whatever.



JOHN W. BOWEN

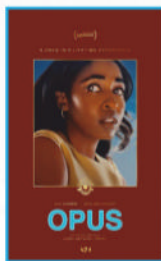
## DEFEAT THE PRESS

### OPUS

Starring Ayo Edebiri, John Malkovich and Juliette Lewis  
Written and directed by Mark Anthony Green  
A24

It's hard to say what was most compelling to me about *Opus* — the fact that it's the feature debut from a magazine section editor (Mark Anthony Green, special projects editor at *GQ*) or for its semi-cynical portrayal of a press junket, of which I have attended many. At the risk of losing my privilege of being invited to any more, I'll admit, they're surreal affairs. Influencers clique up and help each other with selfie stations while journos get all smug about doing more "serious" work. Then the booze starts flowing and, heck, that middling movie you just saw seems to get better with every *Saw*-themed cocktail you imbibe, whaddayaknow.

*Opus* sees a group of influencers, reporters, and music journalists invited to an isolated compound for a weekend to get the inside scoop on the new album from eccentric pop god Alfred Moretti (John Malkovich). The self-sufficient community seems happy, but rookie scribe Ariel (Ayo Edebiri) gets the sense that something disquieting lurks behind the placid smiles of the blue-uniformed occupants who take away her phone and watch her every move. She grows even



## OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

### THIS ISSUE: LANCE GETS SNOWED IN

#### BRAIN FREEZE



### BLOOD AND SNOW

#### Dystopian Films

For *Rue Morgue*'s summer issue, I figured I'd be contrarian and extend the misery that is the Canadian winter by showcasing three films where the winter just... never... ends. I'm kicking it off with this snow-filled sucker about a couple of scientists near the North Pole (natch) who dig up an ancient meteor that kills one of them and infects the other. Seeking refuge in a nearby research station, the infection spreads among the station's crew, who succumb to the deadly virus one by one. I know, I know, you're probably thinking of a certain John Carpenter movie. But you read this column to have your hopes dashed and I don't aim to disappoint. I pooched many a pause button watching Rob Bottin's eye-popping FX in the Carpenter classic; I recommend you watch *Blood and Snow* with a finger firmly on fast-forward!

BODY COUNT: 8

BEST DRINKING GAME: A shot every time you wish you were watching *The Thing* instead!

#### IN THE MOUNTAINS OF BADNESS



### FREEZE

#### Dark Temple Motion Pictures

Next up is *Freeze*, which concerns the crew of a ship attempting to rescue a lost expedition to the North Pole (natch). Once they become trapped in the ice, it's up to their moderately fearless captain to lead them to safety. Not surprisingly, things get pretty bleak, and that's before the hapless sailors find themselves set upon by strange fish creatures intent on eating their innards. Borrowing heavily from H.P. Lovecraft's tales of ancient undersea monsters, *Freeze* tries to honour the late author's work with a limited budget and some limited, if enthusiastic, stagecraft. Alas, they're up against sea creatures that look more like the flying monkeys from *The Wizard of Oz* than the demented beasts of a Lovecraftian nightmare. Period pieces are a challenge no matter how you slice it, so kudos to the cast and crew for trying the improbable and not succeeding. Best viewed with a cold beer and a tub of tartar sauce!

BODY COUNT: 12

BEST DRINKING GAME: A shot every time you see a sea monster!

#### NEEDS GLOBAL HARMING



### ARCTIC ARMAGEDDON

#### The Asylum

A huge underwater earthquake has closed off the volcanic vents that heat the ocean, causing temperatures around the world to fall dramatically. Sound familiar? Look back 21 years to a movie called *The Day After Tomorrow*, because it's basically the same plot. The difference is that in *Arctic Armageddon*, the crew of a U.S. nuclear submarine are the only ones who can save the planet. If you're a reader of this column, you'll know I love The Asylum for making subpar homages to better movies with a fraction of the budget and an even smaller fraction of the talent. But they make an unforgivable blunder with *Arctic Armageddon* by giving a miniscule body count to a global catastrophe. Still, you can always warm your bones by throwing this into the fire after you watch it, so there's that.

BODY COUNT: 10

BEST DRINKING GAME: A shot every time you want more people to die!

LAST CHANCE LANCE



# SHORT CUTS

## BITE-SIZED FRIGHTS FOR SMALL APPETITES

### ON THE SLAB: BEST SERVED COLD

#### MAKE ME A SANDWICH

3:00 mins/YouTube via Deformed Lunchbox's Channel

Doting housewife Marcy (Anne Shepherd) tries to occupy herself with her hobbies when she's interrupted by the sharp yells of her husband Johnson (Peter Hodgins), demanding that she make him a sandwich while he lazes in front of the television set. Marcy grows more rattled with each trip to the kitchen, emboldening her to add extra ingredients to his favourite meal, leading to a meaty conclusion. Canadian filmmakers Denman Hatch and Matt Hamilton take this oft-quoted misogynistic catchphrase to the extreme in this short, fleshing out a nightmarish scenario of domesticity in a scant three minutes. Hatch would later go on to direct the 2024 mystery horror *Baleful*, also available on Deformed Lunchbox's YouTube channel.

#### STUCK

14:08 mins/YouTube via Alter Channel

While arriving at her girls' gymnastics gym, Coach (Nicola Lambo) notices a suspicious man (Davey Johnson) in the parking lot. When she questions his reason for being there, he insults her and drives off. Later, while her class is warming up, she notices him still creeping on her students and decides to take matters into her own hands – or feet, as it were. With *Stuck*, director David Mikalson provides one of the most unadulterated revenge fantasies rendered in short film format. While Coach's actions are both excessive and understandable, it is the extended length of time spent on the retribution that really moves the needle into dark comedy territory, complete with some over-the-top gore gags. At the end of the day, though, it's good just to see perverts get wrecked.

#### TIGHT

13:10 mins/Vimeo via Jessica Barr's Channel

A young wife and new mother (Fabianne Therese) is struggling with the inexplicable pain she is now experiencing during sex with her husband (Elliot Gross). She spends her days alone, her only comfort coming from wrapping their belongings in plastic in preparation for a big move. Then, after a visit with her gynecologist, she receives some deeply distressing news that rocks her to her very core. Despite its darkly comic vibe, *Tight* is a very disturbing watch, one that will have you looking up the "husband stitch," a very real and barbaric medical practice. While on the surface, the use of ClingWrap may seem like a dissociative tool that becomes an instrument of wrath, it also ties into the overall theme of the film. *Tight* is short and strong; we hope to see more from writer/director Jessica Barr in the future.

JAY CLARKE

more suspicious when guests start going missing. Is this trip really about the new Moretti album or are there more sinister plans in store?

An accurate review of *Opus* needn't be lengthy or detailed to be fair – "*Midsommar* press trip" or "*The Menu* of pop music" would do the job. But since I have the space, kudos are due to top-notch performances across the board, especially Malkovich, who plays the bedazzled Moretti with the perfect balance of absurdism and self-seriousness. *Opus* sets up a compelling scenario with interesting players, but the journey from "this is great" to "we need to get the fuck out of here" lacks a flow that would keep the audience in step with the protagonist. It doesn't reinvent the Harga ritual or tie up its own loose ends but there are worse art crimes – like Moretti's more vulgar dance moves.

ANDREA SUBISSATI

### GOOD GRIEF

#### STARVE ACRE

Starring Matt Smith, Morfydd Clark and Arthur Shaw

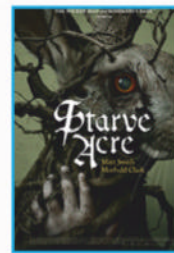
Written and directed by Daniel Kokotajlo  
BFI Distribution

Juliette (Morfydd Clark, *Saint Maud*) and Richard (Matt Smith, *Doctor fucking Who*) are living a quiet existence on the English moors. Their greatest treasure is their son Owen (Arthur Shaw), a troubled boy with a history of violent behaviour and a mind for folk tales. When fate takes that treasure away, the sorrow that sweeps their cottage is a powerful one. Juliette turns away from the world, sleeping away the weight of her emotions, while Richard takes a sabbatical from his archaeology position, digging endlessly in the fields around his home. As the work progresses, he finds evidence that the stories he and his son heard growing up may be rooted in something more sinister than mere imagination.

There's a lot to be praised in the execution of *Starve Acre*; Clark and Smith are predictably fantastic in every scene, with Clark bringing a very realized hopelessness to Juliette's grief. As Richard, Smith conveys a maelstrom of woe barely kept in check by the flesh he lives in, his posture bent by the force of it. Credit is also well deserved to cinematographer Adam Scarth, who does an incredible job capturing the haunting beauty of the English countryside.

It's when it comes to coalescing its story in a satisfying way that *Starve Acre* loses its footing. There are moments that evoke everything from *Hereditary* to *Pet Sematary* but these dominoes of horror fall too far away from each other to make an impact. Elements like Richard's relationship with his father and how it connects to the tales he was raised on are genuinely chilling but lack the emphasis and throughline they deserve. The third act accelerates in a compelling way, but the execution feels almost rushed at that point. The sacrifices in *Starve Acre* are more than worth the flame, it's the wicker man they're burned in that can't seem to hold their weight.

DR. BENNY GRAVES





CANADIAN BODY HORROR KING DAVID CRONENBERG RETURNS WITH *THE SHROUDS*, A MOVIE THAT TAKES TECH DYSTOPIA TO THE GRAVE AND BEYOND

# DEATH CONNECT

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

Like so many of David Cronenberg's movies, *The Shrouds* (currently in release from Sideshow and Janus Films in the U.S. and Sphere Films in Canada) dwells at the intersection between science and death. It deals with the latter subject perhaps more directly than anything he's made before, focusing on Karsh (Vincent Cassel), an entrepreneur who has created GraveTech, through which people can observe and monitor their dead loved ones wrapped in black, leathery shrouds. One of this technology's most compulsive users is Karsh himself, who was inspired to create it by the death of his beloved wife (Diane Kruger), so when hers and other GraveTech markers are desecrated, he becomes determined to uncover the culprits.

Cronenberg was inspired to write and direct *The Shrouds* by the death of his own wife in 2017, so the film is deeply rooted in his own emotions. When it came to the sci-tech elements, including the shrouds themselves, that was more of a collaborative process.

"When I'm working on a screenplay, I write detailed descriptions of things that are strange and new," he says. "That helps me understand what the movie is and gives my production team a start on how to actualize those things. But then when you go to create something physically, that's when you get into the nitty-gritty. The shrouds as presented onscreen are quite different from what I originally described in my script. That's because

I was working with Carol Spier, the production designer, and Anne Dixon, the costume designer, and the props people, and everybody got into that process. So, it's a collaboration, ultimately, starting with the script but then figuring out what it's really going to look like, and how it will function."

The science in Cronenberg's genre cinema has taken on many forms, from medicine to video to futuristic teleporting tech. And it's a subject that interests him as much today as when he got started.

"I think it's one of the primary modes of creative expression for human beings, which differentiates them from all other life forms," he says. "It's

an innate part of life — even more so these days, with the advances in technology. Often, when I'm speaking to an audience, I'll say, 'I'm listening to you through hearing aids, and I'm seeing you through plastic lenses that have replaced the real lenses in my eyes, because I've had laser cataract surgery.' So, I'm already bionic, you know? I guess you could say that I'm curating the world through technology, in my own body.

"So, it's hard for me not to think about that; it's a major part of my existence, and I think many other people's too," he continues. "Even young people these days. It used to be that only old people would talk about their latest medical adventures — what pills they're taking and what surgery they've had. And now, I can talk very straightforwardly to any young person about that stuff, because they've all experienced some version of that. And of course, we live now on our phones, so we've basically outsourced our memories to our devices."

Looking back at his past classics, many have found scientific prescience in Cronenberg's work, with films such as *Rabid* and *Videodrome* seeming to anticipate later advances in biology and communication. The filmmaker himself doesn't quite view it that way: "I don't think of art as prophecy, and I don't think of myself as any kind of prophet either. I believe that as an artist, you have these antennae that are very sensitive to what is going on and are picking up signals from the zeitgeist

that maybe other people aren't picking up on.

"Was I really anticipating the internet [in *Videodrome*]?" he continues. "Well, the movie certainly creates a sort of interaction between what's happening on a screen and the person who's watching it, so I did a little bit. And with *Rabid*, it was my interest in the idea of a cell that could form itself into any kind of tissue, depending on its context, which seemed obvious to me. It wasn't a well-defined scientific principle in biology at that point, but I was talking about stem cells, basically, and I invented my own very primitive version of that." 🧠





# REISSUED & REANIMATED

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD



## THE LAST SHARK FINALLY RESURFACES

Since the beginning of the DVD boom back in the late '90s, the most coveted titles by horror disc collectors have included uncut, properly presented editions of Italian genre films. Among these movies, the white whale (so to speak) has been Enzo G. Castellari's *Jaws* derivative *The Last Shark*. Retitled *Great White* by U.S. distributor Film Ventures International, it was in the midst of a fairly successful stateside release in 1982 when Universal Pictures obtained a legal injunction against any subsequent exhibition. As a result, it has been absent from official American video release, even as it eventually enjoyed various disc editions in Europe.

This summer, Britain's new boutique label Treasured Films brings *The Last Shark* into English-speaking waters with a limited-edition Blu-ray, now in pre-orders and scheduled at presstime for a June 6 release. Packaged in a slipcase with an illustrated collector's booklet plus webstore-exclusive poster and magnet, it supplements the widescreen transfer with audio commentary and a feeding frenzy of interviews with Castellari and his collaborators.

Run by Graeme Lloyd and Tom Lee Rutter, Treasured has already issued fright fare as diverse as Michael Ritchie's *The Island*, Jeff Lieberman's *Satan's Little Helper*, and Frank Agrama's *Dawn of the Mummy*, along with An-

tonio Margheriti's actioner *The Last Hunter*.

"When we saw that *The Last Shark* was up for grabs [from *Hunter*'s sales agent], it was one of those fight-or-flight moments – or should it be sink-or-swim?" Rutter recalls. "We are very fond of Italian genre cinema's penchant for a good cash-in flick, not to mention Castellari's films, so these elements made for the perfect storm to make a go of it. Not only that, but for a Blu-ray label still in its infancy, to be able to offer something that has been long out of circulation in a respectable edition is exactly the kind of thing we want to do to grow."

Plus, operating out of the UK exempted them from Universal's injunction.

"It was very much a North American beef," Rutter notes, "though we are very much aware of the perils of dealing with films with this sort of history. We are also aware it's a fun movie that shouldn't be courting this level of trouble in this day and age, and we were assured by the sales agent that it was strictly an American issue, and we shouldn't have any problems of our own."

For the special features, Eugenio Ercolani serves up extensive interviews and video essays, including talks with Castellari, producers Maurizio Amati and Ugo Tucci, and actor Massimo Vanni. Ercolani also shares the commentary with author and Eurohorror expert Troy Howarth,



offering valuable insights into why *The Last Shark* shouldn't be dismissed as a mere *Jaws* rip-off.

"*The Last Shark* is definitely deserving of re-evaluation," concludes Rutter. "It's a hoot of a film, with so many amazing and bloody set pieces. If you look at how much sharksploitation has blown up in recent years, it's great to be able to roll out one of the heavy-hitting forefront titles of that subgenre. Plus, any Enzo G. Castellari movie should be given the floor for further discussion!"





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# IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Carrie On, Dick  
by John W. Bowen

Richard Burton once famously remarked, "I've done the most awful rubbish in order to have somewhere to go in the morning." That may seem a tad jaundiced for an actor – nay, a freakin' institution – who counted *Becket*, *Look Back in Anger*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Equus*, and a veritable pantaloons-load of Shakespeare leads among his credits, not to mention seven Oscar noms. Of course, it's likely he was referring to such (cough) secondary fare as *Bluebeard*, *The Klansman*, and – Pazuzu save us all! – the mega-budget skid mark that was *Exorcist II: The Heretic*.

It was a common enough occurrence, particularly in the 1970s, to see respected UK *theah-tah* types whoring themselves out for the filthiest of Hollywood lucre; one could find oneself in worse company than Laurence Olivier, Michael Caine, and Peter O'Toole, slumming as they may have been in B-cheese to pay off mansion mortgages and kaiju-size bar tabs between prestige pics. So, it's not like anyone was surprised in '78 to see Dicky B. turn up in *The Medusa Touch* as John Morlar, a novelist whose combo of telekinetic capabilities and a deep and abiding dislike of humanity make Carrie White and those kids from *The Fury* look like nominally gifted amateurs.

When we meet him in the film's opening minutes, he's already gone full 9/11 with a 747 and an apartment building and is in the process of fucking over three astronauts attempting a lunar landing, all for misanthropic shits and giggles. That's his



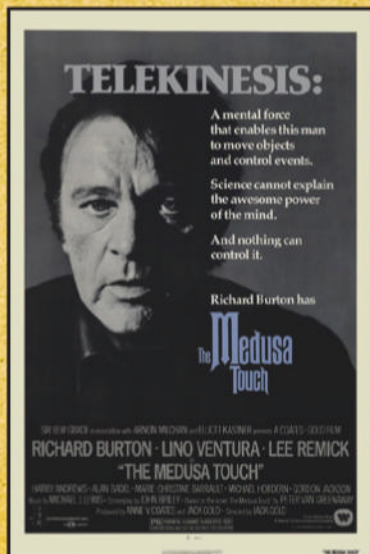
stated plan anyway, until an unidentified visitor goes all blunt-force drama on Morlar's melon with a statue of Napoleon, sending him into a near-comatose state for the rest of the movie's run time, forcing us to view the bulk of his story in flashback. (Well, isn't that convenient, given that Burton, reputedly in no mood for more hokum-themed fare after *Exorcist II*, was anxious to get this part out of the way.)

Lino Ventura plays the detective investigating the assault on Morlar; Lee Remick is the psychiatrist who glibly dishes to Ventura on her still-technically-living patient, apparently without giving a rat's tuchus for the quaint old convention of doctor-patient confidentiality. "Most patients feel the world is too much for them," she tells the cop, "Mr. Morlar felt he was too much for the world." All of which sets us up for a solid hour of retroactive exposition covering Morlar's early experiments in telekinastiness, and none of which provides much insight into his motives, beyond basically "I hated that guy" and "She pissed me off." Then we're into the

third act, and the inevitable Race Against Time ensues as these two suspect that Morlar is plotting one last homicidal huzzah from his hospital bed – after all, he's near death but his EEG monitor shows his brain boogying on at an extraordinary rate. Could he be planning to wreak havoc on an upcoming London event attended by the queen, sundry aristocracy, and world leaders at a rickety old cathedral that's been experiencing structural instability? Hmmm.

A cynic (who, *moi?*) might even call *The Medusa Touch* purpose-built. It was just two years after *Carrie*, and theatre seats were still damp with the public's newfound obsession with all things telekinetic. *Ruby* (1977), *Jennifer, Patrick*, and *The Fury* (all 1978) were busy chowing down our favourite psycho prom queen's table scraps. Concurrently, the disaster movie craze was rapidly waning but there were still plenty of bucks to be milked from star-bedizened epics about large things blowing up, falling over or imploding. All of which might have been excusable had *Medusa* generated more than barely adequate receipts during its cursory theatrical run.

And here I suddenly am at the bottom of the page, so you'd best get the hell out of my basement before I provoke editorial wrath by going way over the word count limit to tell you how idiotic and juvenile and clunky and just plain inappropriate the film's title is, since the story has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with the mythical figure of Medu... 🐍





*Horror in Culture & Entertainment*

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# Ghosts Next Door



SHE DIED AS SHE  
LIVED: DELICIOUSLY  
NOTES FROM  
A DEATH CAFE

BY S. ELIZABETH

AS HORROR FANS, WE'RE INTIMATELY ACQUAINTED WITH DEATH IN THE ABSTRACT – albeit frequently in its most gruesome incarnations. We devour tales of creative kills and supernatural ends, analyze the metaphysical implications of various forms of undeath, and debate the finer points of practical effects versus CGI gore. Yet when it comes to discussing actual mortality – our own or that of our loved ones – many of us suddenly find our encyclopedic knowledge of *Final Destination* deaths surprisingly unhelpful. Enter the Death Cafe, where strangers gather to discuss the ultimate spoiler: that we're all going to die. These meetings aren't grief counselling sessions or morbid support groups, but rather open discussions about mortality with no agenda beyond increasing awareness of death to help people make the most of their finite lives.

The concept originated with Swiss sociologist Bernard Crettaz's *Cafés mortels* and was developed into its current form by Jon Underwood and Sue Barsky Reid in London, 2011. Since then, over 20,000 Death Cafes have been held across 93 countries, proving that people everywhere harbour

**“DEATH CAFES  
INVITE US TO  
STEP BEYOND  
STORYTELLING INTO  
GENUINE DIALOGUE,  
TRANSFORMING  
OUR CULTURAL  
OBSESSION WITH  
DEATH INTO  
MEANINGFUL  
CONNECTION.”**

an appetite for frank discussions about shuffling off this mortal coil. It's part of a larger death-positive movement that seeks to normalize conversations about mortality, challenge the death-denying culture we live in, and reclaim our relationship with life's only guarantee.

My own journey with Death Cafe began in 2014, in the wake of profound personal loss. After my



mother's death in late 2013 and saying goodbye to both my beloved grandparents in the years that followed, death ceased to be an abstract concept. Despite being a squirrely goblin who could barely open her mouth to speak to a stranger, I found myself organizing and even hosting Orlando's first such gathering. Eleven individuals convened in my sister's living room – some finding us through online venues as unlikely as Tumblr and Instagram – to explore their thoughts about mortality.

What makes these gatherings unique is their deliberately unstructured nature – eleven strangers seated in a circle, as if an opening chapter of a Grady Hendrix novel where bizarre supernatural hijinks should ensue (none did, but not for lack of proper horror movie set-up and surreal atmosphere!). There are no keynote speakers, no prescribed topics, and no agenda to push. Just humans connecting over our shared fate, fortified by generous slices of Irish Wake Cake and Funeral Biscuits (yes, those are real things, and I'm happy to share recipes).

Through the cafes I hosted from 2014 to 2016, conversations ranged from practical matters like digital legacies to home funeral practices to pet preservation, from how death manifests in art throughout history, to that episode of *Buffy* where her mom dies – a raw, devastating portrayal that leaves one hollowed out and heartsore. I felt emboldened to share my own final wishes: a detailed recipe for my choicest body parts, brined and dry-rubbed, slow-smoked over applewood chips for fifteen hours and served with no fewer than a dozen delectable dipping sauces. I want for myself a funeral celebration of delicious, sobbing strangeness. (The group seemed to appreciate both the specificity of the sentiment and the menu planning. At least some of them... I think?)

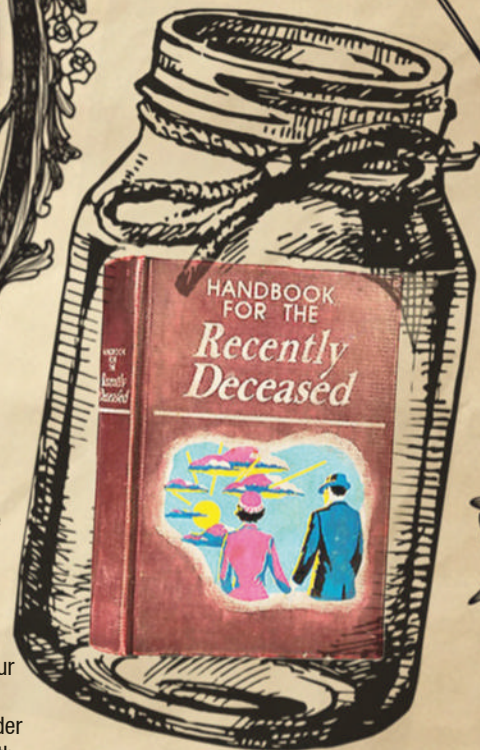
Looking back now, almost a decade later, the magic of Death Cafe still lies in its ability to transform what could be a heavy, oppressive topic into something approaching... cozy? Dare I say,

delightful? Our guest book, a replica of the appropriately titled *Handbook for the Recently Deceased* from *Beetlejuice*, was filled with signatures and reflections that ranged from profound to playful, each entry a testament to the human capacity to find connection in our shared mortality.

Indeed, these gatherings serve as a reminder that our fascination with death in fiction – whether through horror films or literary memoirs or television dramas – might stem from a deeper need to process our relationship with mortality itself. Death Cafes invite us to step beyond storytelling into genuine dialogue, transforming our cultural obsession with death into meaningful connection.

Whether you're a seasoned horror aficionado

or simply death-curious, consider seeking out a Death Cafe in your area. After all, what better way to appreciate life's horrifically beautiful ride than by occasionally stopping to acknowledge its inevitable end? Just don't forget the cake (maybe sans pearl-clutchingly taboo cannibalistic bits) – cozying up so closely with death for an afternoon leaves the soul a mite peckish. 🍷



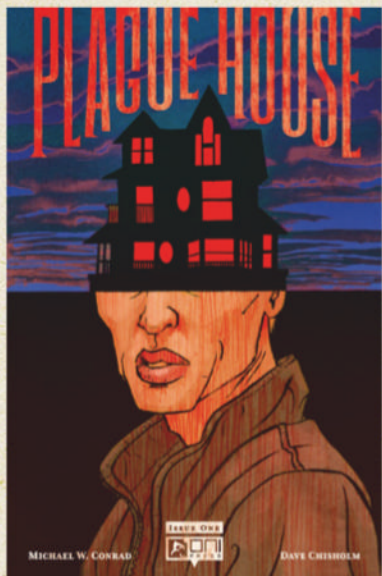


# BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

The idea of a specific location being cursed by something malignant is arguably as old as humanity itself. Whether a haunted cave, mountain, or house, such places have fascinated and terrified humans for millennia and still continue to resonate. Hoping to provide a new perspective on old haunts are writer Michael W. Conrad and artist Dave Chisholm, whose series *Plague House* aims to give the haunted house trope a new lease on life.

"As far back as we can trace in human history, there have been locations that have been seen as holy, cursed, and all [points] in between," says Conrad. "For some, this has been based on practical data; even the Bible makes mention of such things. The title *Plague House* is in fact a reference to a biblical line in Leviticus that warns about a 'plague' in the walls of certain locations. Like much of the Bible, this can be read literally as a means of how an ancient person might deal with a place afflicted with disease, or it can be read with an eye to the supernatural."



The supernatural is very much on the mind of Del, a seasoned ghost hunter who, together with his colleagues (a skeptic named Holland and a holy man named Jacob), are about to tackle the abandoned McCabe home. Thirteen years ago, Orin McCabe, an otherwise pleasant and stable family man, took a hammer and murdered his entire family. Convinced the massacre was a result of some otherworldly force, Del is determined to find some answers.

It's difficult to discuss *Plague House* without giving away too many of its secrets, but suffice

it to say the bulk of the first issue plays out like a standard haunted house tale, complete with spectral manifestations lurking in the background (and in some cases, very much in the foreground) and an *Amityville*-style flashback to McCabe's brutal crime. However, the final pages throw a spanner into the plumbing, putting what we've just witnessed in a whole new context. It's a revelation that broadens the story's scope considerably while forcing readers to re-evaluate what they've just read – none of which would have been nearly as effective had the creators not lulled us into a false sense of security with familiar surroundings.

"Hauntings and ghosts offer a great allegorical basis for stories," reveals Conrad. "For most of us, ghosts can easily be seen as symbols of unfinished work, a balance that needs to be regained, or even a desire for revenge. I love that. While I am often disappointed by the sameness of many stories about hauntings, when they're done well it's a delight. My hope is that we've ticked those boxes, while willfully subverting expectations."

While the haunted house elements on display are undeniably strong in their own right, Chisholm's art in particular imbues these pages with an atmosphere of dread, and the sequence where McCabe kills his family is genuinely unsettling. The rest of the series may explore new cursed ground, but it promises to be no less



*Plague House: A novel take on the classic haunted house trope that explores new cursed ground.*

bloody or disturbing.

"This is a violent story, and Dave hasn't been shy about his approach to how that is represented," says Conrad. "While violence is often important in horror, dread and uncertainty are critical elements, and *Plague House* just might compel readers to consider their own moral compass, and the degree to which they're comfortable with what we're presenting. By the time the series is over, readers might discover that the subtext of the story challenges some of their feelings about how we contend with unspeakable acts."

FOLLOW PEDRO ON X @PCABEZUELO



## QUICK CUTS

**Something lies beneath** the abandoned house that once belonged to teenage Brian's family. Exactly what remains to be seen, but it's enough to have given the home a notorious reputation for being haunted. On a rainy afternoon in the summer of 1983, Brian and his best friend Mike decide to finally investigate the rumours and embark on a journey to discover terrifying secrets in *Far Down Below*. Much of the issue is spent on Mike and Brian's friendship and their initial exploration of the house, and the rapport between the two teens rings true. Combined with the '80s setting, there's a strong *Stranger Things* vibe to the book, which is no bad thing. If the issue has a flaw, it's that there's not enough of a hook in terms of what Brian and Mike are about to face. There is a prologue set in 1865 that establishes something deadly exists, but a stronger hint as to what makes this threat unique would add an extra incentive to keep reading.



**When you think** about it, teeth can inflict quite a bit of damage. They can bite, tear, gnash, rip, or crunch – not unlike the protagonist of *The Tooth*, an anthropomorphic fang that rends and pulverizes its victims like so much chewing gum. When not on a killing spree, the Tooth is a mild-mannered molar residing in the mouth of hapless Graham Stone, prepared to spring into action when danger beckons. Which it frequently does, thanks to an evil sorcerer who wishes to possess the Tooth's power for himself. By the time an army of Teeth are duking it out with a legion of vampire women, you know you're reading something deliciously loopy and special. The creators are all in on the joke, of course, presenting the story in the style of old pulp monster comics, complete with ads, letter columns, and hyperbolic captions. Originally published in 2011, this new edition reprints the full graphic novel in all its gory glory so if you missed it the first time, now's your chance to witness the colossal carnage of the Tooth, the whole Tooth, and nothing but the Tooth.



**Time for some** Japanese just desserts, courtesy of *Shadows of Kyoto* – an anthology of four tales that uncover some of the city's most haunted locales. Your guide on this twisted tour is Kotone, a demure girl who won't hesitate to reprimand any disrespect. This is bad news for our four protagonists: an arrogant

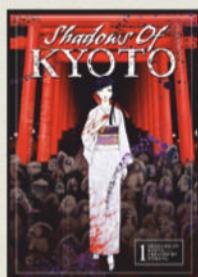
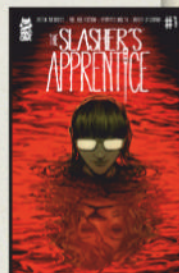
live streamer who mocks a sacred shrine; a deadbeat who steals temple offerings; a promiscuous woman looking to do it in a cemetery; and a schoolgirl who bullies and manipulates those in her clique. To say things go badly for them is a gross understatement. No matter how graphic American horror comics become, there's something about manga that manages to raise that level of gore tenfold. It's not enough to simply show incredibly detailed scenes of bloodletting, evisceration, amputation, and impalement – they have to be done within a particularly twisted scenario. So, when a woman is haunted by the ghosts of the children she's aborted, who plead with her to give birth to them, they have to painfully crawl back inside her first before the blood-gushing, belly-bursting climax.

**Among my most** disturbing recurring nightmares is one where I'm suddenly back at school, about to take an exam I've not prepared for or some other scholastic chore. Author Sam Fonseca has effectively tapped this common scenario in *Shadowplay: Midnight School*, a deeply unsettling account of a group of students trapped in a school with never-ending classes. Our hero, a young misfit with no friends, must deal with violent physical and verbal abuse from teachers and peers, day after day, until he finally makes a desperate bid for freedom. Filled with haunting imagery, *Midnight School* straddles the line between abstraction and linear narrative. Readers are provided enough



background information to piece things together but ultimately the book's lasting resonance lies in its ability to deal with a number of social and personal anxieties without ever feeling like the author has taken on too much. Even if the thought of going back to school doesn't terrify you, there are enough themes here – disappointing others, loss of individuality, broken dreams – to strike a chord.

**Tips to finding** a successful career path: 1) Find something you love to do; 2) Make some good connections with people in that profession; and 3) Throw yourself into your work. In Riley's case, being the host of a serial killer podcast isn't enough: she's chosen to become the Slasher's Apprentice. Specifically, she's hoping to work with/for the notorious lion-masked Hopton Valley Killer, who's tallied up at least 125 murders since 1974 but who has fallen out of the limelight in recent years. Riley is looking to get his career back on track and learn the ropes along the way. Whether the killer will accept her bizarre offer is one of the questions raised in the first issue, along with whether Riley's motives are purely homicidal or the product of some hidden agenda. Will she be slayer, victim, accomplice, or avenger? A tongue-in-cheek approach and over-the-top kills lay the groundwork for a book where just about anything can happen, a surefire reason to keep on reading. 🍷



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## GOTHIC MËTIS:

CUNNING MONSTROSITY, SHAPESHIFTING  
AND SUBVERSION LINKING THE NINETEENTH  
CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

Natasha Reby Coulthard

University of Wales Press

*Gothic Mëtis* is quite the undertaking, both for author Natasha Reby Coulthard and for any reader thinking of tackling her book. Though certain stretches feel like burrowing into an impenetrable tome, Coulthard periodically (and thankfully) makes her dense theory more accessible.

Many horror fans will be familiar with the history, style, and themes of Gothic literature, but the concept of *mëtis* ("an obscure ancient cunning") has gotten far less attention in our modern world. Coulthard aims to fix that by leading the reader

through a thorough explanation of the classical origins of the term and a contextual look at why it is not currently used as a way to approach stories.

*Mëtis* is a cunning, liminal, mode of thinking that was once rampant in Greek mythology but has largely been abandoned by contemporary thinkers. However, Coulthard argues that its "fuzziness"

places it in a unique position to reapproach Gothic media. After all, the monstrous can be the creatures that are most capable of inhabiting the zones between human and post-human. Just look to Frankenstein's monster and Mr. Hyde to begin to understand the ways this might work.

Though her prose can be heavy at times, it does feel appropriate for the formality of the topic and academic nature of the writing. It is quite clear that Coulthard knows the subject inside out and backwards, though this will not necessarily increase a reader's understanding.

As an example, though much time and care is taken to examine and introduce *mëtis* and how it interplays with the Gothic, it is not always clear what constitutes *mëtis* in the first place. Taking a liberal definition with both the terms is admirable and understandable, but with such a wide embrace, an equally in-depth contrast would have

worked wonders for clarity of scope.

*Gothic Mëtis* is not a casual read by any means, but it is a nuanced and compelling combination of two disparate concepts by an obviously passionate author.

DEIRDRE CRIMMINS

HORROR ON THE BRAIN  
THE NEUROSCIENCE BEHIND SCIENCE FICTION

Austin Lim, PhD

Prometheus Books

*Horror on the Brain* is not so much a book about the genre as one that uses the genre to give the contents their flavour and as a manner to introduce and move through the volume's various heady talking points.

Author Austin Lim, PhD takes us deep inside our skulls and biological systems to explain and explore various emotional states (fear, happiness) and neurological conditions, from those born of cerebral injury (accident or surgery) or malformation, to those that scientists still know much less about. There are investigations into "Life, Death, and Reanimation" and "Illusions and Delusions," as well as the inner workings of sleep, pain, and personality. His breakdown of the "uncanny valley" concept and how it functions is top-notch.

In his introduction, Lim explains that finding the right balance between sharing enough information without getting too clinical was tricky, and he does a commendable job throughout,

giving readers ample explanations to form a base understanding of the biological mechanisms at play without losing them to pages and pages of impenetrable scientific jargon. The various real-life case studies he presents are among the most interesting parts of the proceedings.

While the book utilizes characters, scenarios, and quotes from popular horror and sci-fi films and fiction as a propulsive device, *Horror on the Brain* doesn't offer much in the way of new knowledge of these properties, though it does reveal which creatives suffer from synesthesia, wherein people "experience a simultaneous blending of senses" – a cohort that includes composers Leonard Bernstein and Hans Zimmer and author Vladimir Nabokov.

By the book's end, readers will have a much

better idea of what's going on in their own heads, the heads of the characters in their favourite films and stories, and the heads of those around them. Never a bad thing!

MONICA S. KUEBLER

ART! TRASH! TERROR!  
ADVENTURES IN STRANGE CINEMA

Chris Alexander

Headpress

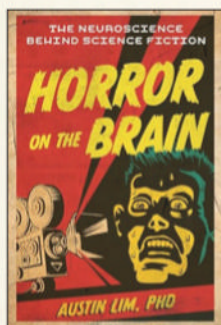
Not to stereotype, but horror fanatics are "show-ers," not "grow-ers." By that I mean, we tend to show the films and fiction we like to anyone who will listen, and we never grow out of our love for the genre. What did you think I meant?

When I was a wee lad, it was my duty to show my friends, family, and even the occasional patient babysitter the bootleg VHS tapes of, say, the myriad cuts of *Army of Darkness* floating around in almost-watchable quality. If something made a positive impact in my life, everyone needed to know about it, whether they liked it or not! Reading

*Art! Trash! Terror! Adventures in Strange Cinema*, it's clear that writer and former *Fangoria* editor Chris Alexander is a kindred spirit. Alexander isn't just getting info about various genre movies from the people who made them but getting at the heart of why these movies were made, why they remain vital, and why he still enjoys them.

The book is a loving testament to the genre and those who work in it. Not only do we get many engaging interviews with the likes of John Waters, Caroline Munro, Werner Herzog, and *The Love Witch*'s Anna Biller, but some lovely essays such as the remembrance of George A. Romero where Alexander's love of the genre shines.

One of the major highlights is an interview with Gary Sherman about his underrated masterpiece *Raw Meat* (please refer to the film under its original title, *Death Line*, while in Sherman's presence). It's full of fascinating recollections, such as Donald Pleasence's fondness for the script because he relished a comedic role even if it meant adding yet another low-budget horror movie to his exhaustive filmography. Or that Christopher Lee's cameo was secured because







ART! TRASH! TERROR!: *Raw Meat* (1972)

he wanted to work with Pleasence and was willing to be paid in scale to do so. Or that the film nearly starred Marlon Brando (yes, really). Worth reading for that short interview alone!

ADAM CLARKE

## THE WENDIGO AND OTHERS: COLLECTED SHORT FICTION, VOL. 3

Algernon Blackwood  
Hippocampus Press

Our review of the first two volumes of Blackwood's collected short fiction ([RM#215](#)) concluded that greatness of an opus such as this author's is not to be cherry-picked, but to be binged through in its entirety. The two new volumes (out of a projected six) only add a wealth of proof to this thesis.

"The Wendigo" is the best horror thing to come out of Canada before David Cronenberg and *Rue Morgue*. Set in the wilderness where only the bravest hunters dare to tread, it depicts their encounter with an ancient spirit that tends to possess people and make them do nasty stuff. Blackwood knew such environments firsthand from several camping trips and it shows.



The stories in the third volume were written at the height of Blackwood's period of leisure, as series' editor S.T. Joshi reminds us in his introduction. Some are better known, like the novella "The Man Whom the Trees Loved," about a man drawn to the forest entity surrounding his house, while others are hard to find, like the epic novella "Sand," set in Egypt. There are a wide range of settings (England, France, Switzerland, Egypt, Canada) and themes, including original takes on vampirism ("The Singular Death of Morton," "The Transfer"), reincarnation ("The Destruction of Smith"), ghosts ("Clairvoyance," about apparitions of unborn children), elementals

("The Glamour of the Snow," "Ancient Lights"), and much else.

The fourth volume is *A Descent into Egypt and Others*, titled after one his most poignant novellas, and it contains such masterpieces as "The Sacrifice," "The Regeneration of Lord Ernie," "The Damned," and a rare essay, "Egypt: An Impression." Read Blackwood and shudder at the wide range of what horror can do, as shown by its master, and presented in its ultimate edition.

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ

## THE ORGANIZATION IS HERE TO SUPPORT YOU

Charlene Elsby  
Weirdpunk Books

In the modern age of mega-corporations and monopolies, it's wonderful to find art that directly spits in its face. That's what Charlene Elsby does in her new novel *The Organization is Here to Support You*, a slow-burn dystopian workplace drama that slaps you in the face with eerie, dystopian horror at the climax – a horror that has been lurking right under your nose the whole time.

Elsby's novel centres around Clarissa Knowles, an employee of the mysterious Organization, who "contribute(s) to its mission to apply non-traditional methods to the non-traditional

## DANTE'S PICK



### BELOW THE GRAND HOTEL

Cat Scully  
Clash Books

Mabel is a thief with some very firm rules, and "never follow marks into a hotel" is one of them. But when she spots a woman with a huge, sparkling yellow diamond necklace, Mabel thinks this could be the heist to end them all. Little does she know the hotel she's about to enter is run by demons... and the price of going after that diamond is going to be her soul.

Soulless and trapped in the Grand Hotel, she must honour the agreement made and feed that yellow diamond 100 souls in a month's time in order to facilitate the boss's demonic ascension. But Mabel isn't exactly one to be told what to do – and with the new friends (as well as some enemies) that she makes within the hotel, she may well bring down the entire ghastly enterprise that both runs on and feeds off New York City's creative talents, especially those no longer in vogue due to society's shifting appetites. That is, if the demons don't get to her first.



In *Below the Grand Hotel*, author Cat Scully dazzles with not just lavish and decadent period set pieces juxtaposed against the overtly monstrous and stark moments of gore and violence, but an impossibly large, shapeshifting building (in the form of the Grand Hotel itself). The story's twists and turns are delicious and emotionally impactful and keep readers guessing as to Mabel's ultimate trajectory as she descends deeper and deeper into the Grand's labyrinthine subterranean levels, making the book a macabre treat from start to finish.

*Below the Grand Hotel* more than lives up to its marketing copy, which describes it as "*The Great Gatsby* meets *Hellraiser*." A sumptuous feast well worth making a reservation for, it's time to book your own stay at the Grand, soul be damned.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



**FATHOM PRESS IS RESURRECTING THE BOOKS OF HORROR'S HEYDAY, ONE OBSCURE AND OVERLOOKED NOVEL AT A TIME**

# BACK FROM THE DEAD

BY JAMES BURRELL

**F**OR MANY, THE 1970s AND '80s WERE THE HEYDAY OF HORROR FICTION, WHEN AUTHORS SUCH AS WILLIAM PETER BLATTY, STEPHEN KING, ANNE RICE, AND DEAN KOONTZ USHERED IN A new era of frights, further propelling literary horror into the mainstream. But while the oft-reprinted works of these icons is easily accessed, there are many others whose books have all but disappeared. Helping to rectify this situation is New York-based Fathom Press, whose Savage Harvest imprint is resurrecting obscure and out-of-print horror titles.

"Fathom was born in 2020, like most things these days, during the pandemic," says creative director Justin Bacolo. "My job was on pause, my father had just passed away from cancer, and I was stuck home all day. I was starting to spiral and needed a distraction. I happened to watch *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* and was like, 'What else can I watch to distract me?' After I exhausted my collection of movies, I looked at what books or short stories there were [and] came across H.G. Wells' 'The Sea Raiders.' I found there were tons of public domain horror stories that were great reads but hard to find. So, I decided, 'Hey, I can put them out.'"

After launching a series of chapbook editions of vintage weird and speculative short fiction, Bacolo set his sights on reissuing novels. He got the idea to create the imprint while trying to re-release Gary Brandner's 1977 werewolf classic *The Howling*.

"I did a little research and found Gary's widow, Martine," he says. "I shot her a message explaining what I was doing with Fathom and that I'd like the opportunity to release *The Howling*. The rights were unfortunately off the table, but she did have the rights to all of Gary's other novels, if I was interested. I looked them up and *The Brain Eaters* seemed like a particularly fun and nasty book. And then I got the idea – if I could get the rights to one book, I could get the rights to two books. So, I reached out to John Russo, then Craig Spector, then John Vance, Jack Vance's son..."

Savage Harvest's first two titles – Russo's *Return of the Living Dead* and Brandner's *The Brain Eaters* – were published last year. They were followed by *Cold Front* by Barry Hammond, John Skipp and Craig Spector's *The Light at the End*, and *Bad Ronald* by Jack Vance. Featuring newly illustrated covers by artist Stephen Andrade, the mass market-sized paperbacks also include an introduction or afterword – some penned by the original authors.



The wintry shocker *Cold Front*, written by Hammond, a Canadian, will be of particular interest to many readers. Published in 1982 and never reprinted, copies of the rare original Signet paperback sell for upwards of a thousand dollars. The novel – which tells of three men on the run who become stranded in the Canadian wilderness and take refuge in an isolated, snowbound cabin occupied by a strange young woman – is an unsettling tale that will make readers wince. Bacolo contemplated a weekend trip to Toronto to view a library copy of the book before purchasing one off eBay, and reveals it took some time to get ahold of the now-retired Hammond.

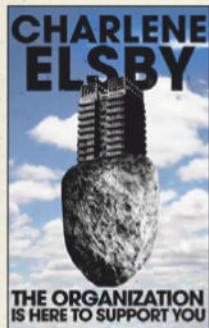
"He has an online presence but isn't very active on social media," he says. "I couldn't find any direct contact information [but] I found out where he used to work and called them up. I left my contact information and, the next morning, I had a message in my inbox from Barry and the contract was signed shortly after that."

Fathom has three titles scheduled for release this summer: *Chainsaw Terror* by Shaun Hutson, *Snowman* by Norman Bogner, and *The Wilds* by Julia Teweles, and more slated for next year.

"Some authors haven't made any money from these titles in years," says Bacolo. "So not only am I excited about bringing these back to print, but I'm proud of making them available to people who want to read them at prices they want to pay, [and] the authors or their estates get to benefit as well. It's a win-win for everyone." 🍷



problems of today.” All employees of The Organization live and work in a facility that has all the technology and provisions they need, and therefore there’s no reason for them to ever leave. Weary of The Organization and the unashamed patriarchal structure that it holds over its ladder-climbing employees, Clarissa makes the decision to depart with her cat and start a new



life with the elusive Dick Richards, with whom she has been talking via The Organization’s interface. Is Dick who she thinks he is? Or is there something more sinister at play?

With last year’s *Violent Faculties*, Elsy proved her talent at creating unique and intelligent horror. While the intense gore of her previous work is absent in *The Organization*, she weaves a profound sense of dread throughout, leaving readers feeling like the curtain is going to be lifted at any second. Buckle up for when it is.

Elsy is a Doctor of Philosophy by day, and it’s evident in everything she writes. Her books are undeniably smart and always have a strong point to make, with the use of borderline-academic language serving as a clever Trojan horse for the obscene and horrific. *The Organization is Here to Support You* is a tight, well-written parable about the state of our modern workforce... you should read it.

RACHEL MEGHAN

## BLACK HOLE SUNDOWN

Brian Hodge  
Cemetery Dance

You are never on safe ground in Brian Hodge’s stories, and trying to predict their endings is a fool’s errand. For example, when in “West of Matamoros, North of Hell,” an American rock band is abducted in Mexico by a cartel offering sacrifices to Santa Muerte... or when in “Insanity Among Penguins” a couple of film buffs go to a private screening of a suppressed Werner Herzog documentary (!), their protagonists are never sure whether the horror will rise out of the evil that people do, or from what it will awaken in themselves.

*Black Hole Sundown* is a real treat: at a hefty 600 pages, it is a veritable two-in-one collection of Hodge’s latest horror efforts. There is tongue-in-cheek Lovecraftiana in “Weird Shadows Over Innsmouth,” about the FBI agents cracking the case of the amphibiously impregnated coastal town, but some are more indirectly Lovecraftian, like “He Sings of Salt and Wormwood,” about a high-risk diver and surfer, his girlfriend who keeps receiving sculpture-like gifts from the ocean, and some sea-worms... The anti-utopian “Butcher’s Blend” is a scarily prescient satire on a society turned into a correctional facility in which those outside of the norm are either forcefully altered or mercilessly cut off. “It’s All the Same Road in the End” must belong among the most chilling stories of the 21st century: two brothers search for their long-lost grandfather through America’s backroads and deserted villages, their only clues a spooky non-human tune and an old photo. Here folk horror meets cosmic horror, à la *True Detective*, but ended right.

If there is a downside to any of this, it comes in the author’s endnotes, “So Long, and Thanks for All the Squid,” where he bids farewell to the horror genre. It’s a pity, but all the more reason to cherish his glorious last hurrah!

DEJAN OGNJANOVIĆ



# LIBRARY OF THE DAMNED

IT CAME FROM CANADA...

late last year, shortly before the U.S. elections, my ten-year-old daughter came home from school with a question about something she’d heard on the playground that was troubling her. “Someone said,” she began, “that if Donald Trump wins the election, America is going to invade us.” At the time, I reassured her that our countries were good friends, had been for decades, and an action like that would be *waaaaay* beyond the pale. I think about that conversation often.

Here’s something you may not know about me: I’m the daughter of immigrants, and I think Canada is a pretty damned great place. Long story short: my paternal grandmother and her children arrived here a decade after WWII, determined to build a better life – and they did. I love my country. I love its diversity, how we tend to come together in times of need, and the fact that my kid doesn’t have to do active shooter drills at school.

You know what else I love? That she has a wonderful cadre of Canadian middle grade authors to look up to. We recently finished reading Trevor Henderson’s debut novel *Scarewaves* about the town of Beacon Point and the incredibly strange and eerie things that occur there. The fast-paced read (featuring illustrations by the author) pitches newcomer Mary and her new friends right into the middle of the unsettling happenings and disturbing sightings, with ever escalating stakes. “Scari-er than *Goosebumps*!” my daughter declared upon completion – and let me assure you, that’s high praise coming from Ms. Wednesday.

It was also fun to reveal to her that Henderson was once our intern here at the magazine; a bit of trivia that blew her mind almost as much as the fact that I’m Facebook friends with Joel A. Sutherland (of *Haunted Canada* fame). Want to know who’s the current king of scares among the Canuck preteen set? That would be Sutherland. He’s written nine of the thirteen volumes that comprise the long-running *Haunted Canada* series, as well as *Haunted* (another series for middle graders), and standalone novels *Summer’s End* and *Screamers*.

Finally, I’d be remiss if I wrote such a column and didn’t bring some much-deserved attention to *Rue Morgue*’s own Jeff Szpirglas, who – when he’s not penning reviews or wrangling kiddos in the classroom – is a prolific middle grade author with a body of work that includes his *Countdown to Danger* series, spooky short story collections, science-y non-fiction (*Fear This Book*, *Gross Universe*), and his latest, *Pages of Doom*, with local illustrator Andrew P. Barr.

It shouldn’t be shocking that Canadians are feeling particularly patriotic right now, so it’s wonderful to see homegrown horror going strong, from stories for the young ones right on up.

Vive le Canada!



MONICA S. KUEBLER

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# THE FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY PAIGE REYNOLDS

224



THIS MONTH:  
THE PETRIFYING PROPS OF PUMPKIN PULP

A **ROOMORGE** COLLECTIBLE





Brian Blair is a modern-day monster kid who has made a career of creating hideous masks and props of all manner of monsters, mutants, clowns, zombies, creatures, toads – even mummified sasquatch toes! Having spent his childhood watching late-night horror flicks and assembling Universal Monsters model kits, he officially formed Pumpkin Pulp in 2006 and the rest is horror history. Count down the remaining hours of your life with one of his terrifying cuckoo clocks or don one of his creations.

## HOMETOWN HAUNT

Muncie, Indiana

## WEAPON OF CHOICE

"When working on a new mask or prop, I first sculpt it out in clay. Usually, I have an idea in my head but instead of sketching it out, I like to just get into the clay and see what I can come up with. After it's sculpted, I make a mould of it. It is then cast in latex or foam and painted and hair and details [are] applied."

## DEEDS

"What I am most proud of in my career is creating my business that is now known worldwide. To have people purchase my work in other countries and saying they are fans is incredibly inspiring to me. Seeing my work being used for movies, ads, and videos is always a thrill and is just as exciting each time."

## MY NIGHTMARE FUEL

"I grew up in a time before the internet, so my childhood was spent drawing monsters and putting monster models together while watching Lon Chaney Jr. turn into the Wolfman. It was my love for horror that kept me on my path to find a way to do it forever. Being able to contribute to the horror community has been amazing and highly rewarding."

## LAST WORDS

"Always follow your dreams, even if that dream is someone else's nightmare!"

## RESTING PLACE

[Pumpkinpulp.com](http://Pumpkinpulp.com), and Pumpkin Pulp on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

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A DUMPSTER DIVE INTO HORROR'S ODDS & CURIOS

# DEVILS IN THE DETAILS

BY  
STACIE  
PONDER

**I WAS DURING THIS UNCEASING  
SEASON OF SNOW AND SPUTUM  
THAT I CONTRACTED COVID AT LAST.**

I know that COVID isn't cool anymore, but hey, I tend to be a few years – if not a few decades – behind on most trends.

My passé cultural obsessions mean that, more often than not, I'm unfit to participate in most conversations about The Newest Horror Thing. (Speaking of which, let's meet back here in five years to talk about Robert Eggers' *Nosferatu*, which I will probably have seen by then. If you'd like to discuss *Twin Peaks*, though, I've finally had that cherry pie popped and I'm good to go.) So while this sickness of mine might have been old news to the world at large, it was breaking news to me and qualified as what the French might call *le doozy*. COVID seemed to attack a different part of my body every day; it was like I could sense it travelling through my meatsack rendering my insides into some kind of Coralie Fargeat fever dream. (Not to brag, but yes, surprise, I actually have seen *The Substance*, thank you.) I lay on my couch in more of a fugue state than usual, wondering if my organs were starting to look as if they'd managed to activate the Lament Configuration.

I know this is all making me sound like someone who might have a "Let me tell you about my bursitis!" bumper sticker on her fender, and I'm not going to recount every achy moment I spent with the plague (though I'm tempted). But the experience, like most things, had me thinking about horror movies. Oddly, not about body horror per se, or movies where someone contracts a virus, such as, uh, *Contracted* or *Virus*. Rather, I got to thinking about all the films where a character undergoes a horrific transformation and then transforms right back to the way they were and everything's fine.

Take the transformation in *An American Werewolf in London*, for example. Rick Baker's Oscar-winning work is still the best in the biz, making every moment of David's gruesome metamorphosis seem painfully real. Hearing the grinding of bones, watching a man's facial structure change to a more canine shape, his hand stretching beyond all reason as it changes into a paw – if you ever thought turning into a werewolf would be fun, it's a sequence that'll dissuade you of that notion. But when the full moon disappears in the morning light, then comes the detail that causes my brain to transform to a more question mark shape: David has become human once more, and the only residual effect of all of the twisting and turning of his skin and bones is... a bit of inconvenient nudity?

This sort of "I'm fine now!" de-transformation happens all over the horrorsphere. In the original *Fright Night* (nope, ha-

ven't seen the remake!), schoolgirl Amy falls under the smouldering sway of vampire Jerry Dandrige's dance moves and mock turtlenecks, only to be bitten and turned vampire herself. And I do mean *vampire*: when she turns, her hair inexplicably grows about eighteen inches and changes colour from brown to copper. The lower half of her face splits open and becomes a gaping maw full of razor-sharp teeth. Then, when Dandrige is dusted, Amy's back to her schoolgirl look. I can get over the maw becoming a mouth once more, but I spend more time than I should wondering where all that long, copper hair suddenly went. Did it retract into her head? Did it fall out? And if so, can I have a fresh wig made?

I know that horror needs these remarkable instances of human/other physical resilience, lest every film be a one-way tragic journey into Brundefly-town. I know myself enough to know I'll never stop thinking about Dracula seamlessly turning from a bat into some fog and then into a regular (if be-fanged) dude. But that kind of mighty morphin' movie magic has been something of a comfort lately, one that's given me hope that all the crappenings inside my meatsack can bounce back and be okay despite Miss COVID's best efforts at changing it all. Fingers crossed there's no inconvenient nudity. 🖤



# HORROR CULTURE





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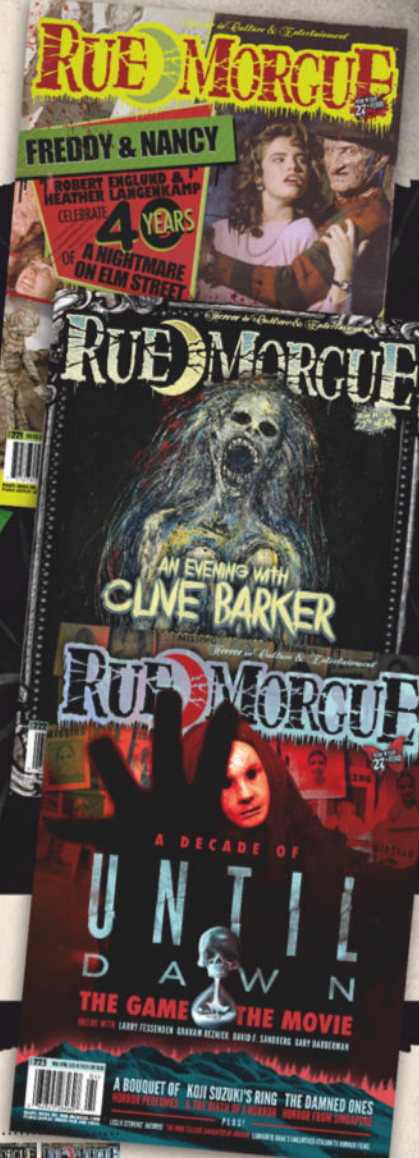
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# AUDIO DROME

DEADLY

DANGEROUS

DECENT

DULL

DRIVEL

DOR  
DEAD ON  
ARRIVAL

ALEX DELLER, JILLIAN DRACHMAN, AARON VON LUPTON, SEAN PLUMMER  
AND JEFF SZPIRGLAS



## THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE

Tobe Hooper and Wayne Bell

WAXWORK RECORDS

It hardly needs to be said, but *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* was – and remains – a groundbreaking masterpiece. While the lurid title, unforgiving storytelling, and stark, savage imagery twisted necks and dropped jaws, it was the sense of grubby unease that really set stomachs roiling. The soundtrack is key to this uncanny power, eschewing horror tropes in favour of an abstract, experimental score and scraping sound design that prods, goads, and smothers like another cackling member of the Sawyer clan. Composed by Tobe Hooper and Wayne Bell in D.I.Y. freeform fashion, the pair proved the old “necessity is the mother of invention” maxim as they squeezed terror from random instruments, toys, animal calls, and kitchen implements. Effective and unsettling as a standalone, this carefully reconstructed soundtrack also sounds incredibly modern: an unwitting prototype for outsider artists who’d later push their own boundaries playing noise, dark ambient, and industrial music. ☠☠☠☠ AD

SOUNDTRACK

Band. Scored by his brother Richard, who teamed up with Joel (son of Jerry) Goldsmith for a whopping five days, the scrappy little score works as a thrown-together potpourri of styles: menacing electronic pulses in the opening title, electric piano melody in the love theme, and even the piano-based “Deputy Chase,” which sounds like it could have underscored a *Keystone Cops* short. Best of all, Mystic Vault has retained the funky instrumental source cues (“Billy’s Radio,” “Chuck’s Radio”) which ended up getting reused in Band’s score for *The House on Sorority Row*, and with good reason: they *rock*. Goldsmith and Band continued to work in this kind of cheesy genre fare but always knew how to keep the momentum of these films moving with a shifting array of musical textures and ideas.

☠☠☠½ JS



## IGGOR CAVALERA / SHANE EMBURY

Neon Gods/Own Your Darkness

COLD SPRING RECORDS

It’s a real duel of the darkest ambience with this release pitting Sepultura percussionist Iggor Cavalera with (or against?) Napalm Death bassist Shane Embury. The artists step away from their metal pedigrees to submit lengthy pieces for each side of this LP collaboration. Cavalera’s “Neon Gods” nearly cracks the twenty-minute mark, in which wailing, almost metallic vocals echo into oblivion. The cacophony is eerie and roomy, making use of dynamics and a shifting, burbling sound palette that’s worthy of a pantheon of horrifying deities. Meanwhile, Embury’s swirling, cavernous track, “Own Your Darkness,” brings to mind the crescendos that rise and fall in Pink Floyd’s “On the Run” from *Dark Side of the Moon* (sans percussion) extended into a lengthy thirteen-minute mood piece.

EXPERIMENTAL

Both Cavalera and Embury’s deliberate pacing on the extended tracks enhances the textural aspects of the mix, with layers that wash over you like cool waves of midnight ocean.

☠☠☠½ JS



## TIM HECKER

Shards

KRANKY

As a title for this elegant collection, *Shards* feels like something of a misnomer. Rather than sharp or shattered, these things are wispy and vaporous: tangible but hard to define, like a ghostly presence lurking just beyond peripheral vision. Despite being culled from a variety of sources – some pieces were written for films like *Luzifer* and Brandon Cronenberg’s *Infinity Pool* – the material coheres effortlessly, with each electronic composition subtly rising and falling while the mood ebbs from weary calm to vague unease. Gauzy drones, intermittent pulses, and drip-fed melodies filter in and out of earshot, sharing sonic DNA with

ELECTRONIC

Kranky Records acts like Labradford, Pan•American, and Stars of the Lid. As with these artists, Hecker’s work can be moulded to fit various needs: a calming – if slightly woozy – soporific, for example, or a point of intense focus for when one needs to blot out the chaotic world outside.

☠☠☠½ AD



## THE BIRTHDAY MASSACRE

GOIT

Pathways

METROPOLIS RECORDS

*Pathways* is album ten from The Birthday Massacre and it’s becoming difficult to come up with new ways to describe the band’s music without falling into formula – which is ironic, given that the Toronto dark pop sextet has spent over twenty years refining its own welcome recipe. If you’re a fan, you know what *Pathways* sounds like: M. Falcure and Rainbow’s chugging metal guitars (“Sleep Tonight”), with the occasional foray into more openly gothic sounds (“All of You”); sweet vocals from singer Chibi and at least one death metal growl (“Whis-



## LASERBLAST

Joel Goldsmith and Richard Band

MYSTIC VAULT

It’s a real laser-blast from the past as Mystic Vault unearths a snazzy new pressing of *Laserblast*, the 1978 schlockfest from producer Charles

SOUNDTRACK

## THE LAST VIDEO STORE

Brandon Boucher

(INDEPENDENT)

A Canadian ode to the VHS rental store and the delightful schlocky fare that rode the waves of the videocassette era, *The Last Video Store* clearly gave Brandon Boucher a bevy of tropes to riff on. The resulting score successfully incorporates moods and melodies that serve the film’s beats while recalling earlier classics. The nearly hour-long album oscillates between brief snippets of score to lengthier tracks, and this is where Boucher’s textural elements have time to develop and loop hypnotically around our synapses. “Why Do You Think I Even Came in Here” is based around an uplifting melody that could have worked well in a John Hughes flick, while “Fury of the Viper,” with its buzzing guitar and galloping beats, sounds like an ode to Europe’s “The Final Countdown” (and is all the better for it). The influences are easy to spot, but here’s an instance where it all works to the music’s benefit. ☠☠☠½ JS

SOUNDTRACK





# PODCASTS FROM BEYOND

## THE BOO CREW PODCAST

**THEME:** Horror Industry

**FORMAT:** Interviews

**FREQUENCY:** Weekly

Within horror podcasts there are those who prefer a casual set-up, with hosts that chat about their personal lives, and those who prefer more straightforward, professional fare. *The Boo Crew* podcast is for the latter. Think of it as *Entertainment Tonight* for horror fans – a polished presentation of genre news, reviews, and interviews with A-list guests.

Hosted by husband-and-wife team Trevor and Lauren Shand, along with their pal Leone D'Antonio, *Boo Crew* has been broadcasting from the hallowed hills of Los Angeles since 2017. Supported by horror media stalwart *Bloody Disgusting*, they've amassed almost 450 episodes on all things dark and creepy. While sometimes the crew gathers to discuss what they've been watching, the majority of episodes are 45- to 60-minute-long interviews with special guests from the realm, including actors Robert Englund, the late Tony Todd, Elvira, Bill Moseley, Katharine Isabelle, Kevin Bacon, Barbara Crampton, and Devon Sawa; filmmakers Robert Eggers, Diablo Cody, and Mike Flanagan; musicians John 5, Tobias Forge (Ghost), Anthrax, Gerard Way (My Chemical Romance), and Twin Temple. Outside of the conventional entertainment industry, the show also speaks to folks from other branches of the genre, such as mystics, prop collectors, oddity collectors, and those who run haunted attractions.

*The Boo Crew* podcast benefits from some pretty slick production value courtesy of Trevor's day job as a radio host and editor, and Lauren's experience as assistant producer of *Loveline with Dr. Drew*. The resulting Top 40 radio-style polish might strike some listeners as lacking sincerity, though their impressive list of guests seems to belie that point.

Bottom line: if you're the type of listener who constantly skips the chatter to get to the core content, give *The Boo Crew* a try. You might find yourself pleasantly exposed to a few fringe areas of the genre along the way, all while getting cozy with your favourite horror celebs.

JESSICA BUCK



per"); twinkling synths from Owen; a poppy '80s throwback ("Wish"); and an arena-worthy ballad ("Cruel Love"), if that arena was filled with back-combed goths. This is less a criticism than an observation, though: The Birthday Massacre has a sound all its own, and *Pathways* is the most precise distillation of it to date.

👾👾👾 1/2 SP



## WET SPECIMENS

*Dying in a Dream*

BRAINSLASH RECORDS /

NO NORMS RECORDS

Albany, New York's least positive-sounding hardcore band is back with its third EP of throat-scraping, bone-shredding, Satan-worshipping blitzkrieg. There isn't a ton to separate the four tracks on *Dying in a Dream* from earlier releases, nor would one expect there to be. The metal is still fist-ramming, the hardcore is still violently pummelling, and the death rock is very well tinged. Songs such as the title track and "Tomb Sentinel" have strong California death rock undertones that seem to be accomplished through odd production techniques more than anything else. Something about Wet Specimens' sound just demands to be heard on vinyl. What holds it all together? Oddly enough, Satan – so much so that this EP comes with its own Chick Tract parody, one that might send you to Hell just for reading it. 👾👾👾 1/2 AVL

PUNK



## SICK N' BEAUTIFUL

*Horror Vacui*

BLKIBLK

Italy's Sick N' Beautiful's latest offering, *Horror Vacui*, is roughly translated as "fear of emptiness," but ironically comes across as a vacuous affair itself. Sure, the band promises horror

METAL

and sci-fi themes, but it doesn't exactly explore these realms with much depth. The charisma behind Herma Sick's vocals is undeniable but isn't enough to hide lyrics devoid of focus or originality. Musically, the band seems to be confused about what kind of album it actually wants to create: fist-pumping yet generic numbers such as "Hate Manifesto" can be found on any mainstream hard rock/metal record. There are also punk and industrial components on *Horror Vacui* but unsuccessfully blended and lacking clarity of vision. Granted, the album has its moments, like on "Haunted," where it takes on a more sombre cinematic air and delivers roughly what we are expecting. All in all, though, this album lives up to its name in the worst way. 👾👾👾 1/2 JD



## NECRAMBULANT

*Upheaval of Malignant Necrambulance*

GORE HOUSE PRODUCTIONS

Just in case the gutscape gracing the album's cover doesn't give it away, Necrambulant plays death metal: ugly, purulent, slam-heavy Death Fucking Metal. Glutinous riffs and meathook harmonics pummel and scrape while gurgling vocals are deployed like a percussion instrument. In addition to assaulting your senses, the band takes aim at good taste, blurping out the lyrical equivalent of cheap hamburger: fatty, nutritionally empty muck that's been hosed off the abattoir floor and pounded into shape by gnashing machinery. Zombies, cannibalistic home invaders, and the stankier end of the *Warhammer 40K* universe all have a place here, as do genre works such as *The Blob*, *The Thing* and the *August Underground* trilogy. Cannibal Corpse and Sanguisgabogg fans will be in hog's heaven, but if you're still unsure then the best introduction is to slap your eyeballs on the claymation video for their Peter Jackson-inspired single "Chunked Pus Chowder."

👾👾👾 AD





# THE CRAZY WORLD OF ARTHUR BROWN



**HO THE HELL IS ARTHUR BROWN? WE CAN'T REALLY HOLD IT AGAINST YOU IF YOU DON'T KNOW. AFTER ALL, THE YORKSHIRE NATIVE'S BANSHEE SCREAMS HAVEN'T YIELDED A HIT SINCE 1968.**

Regardless, even those not acquainted with the God of Hell-fire (in reference to the aforementioned hit single "Fire") cannot deny Brown's influence in horror rock. Brown contributed vocals to the Alan Parsons Project's "The Tell-Tale Heart" on the Poe-themed concept album *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (1976) appeared in The Who's *Tommy* (as The Priest), and his stage-worn corpse paint and wild theatrics (including famously lighting his own head on fire) ultimately informed everyone from Alice Cooper to Kiss to King Diamond and Iron Maiden.

Now, just in time for his 83rd birthday (!), Brown is preparing to release a brand-new album along with embarking on a 2025 European tour that will include an expansive stage production that promises to summarize the living legend's career (so far).

"People can expect the unexpected," Brown assures me cryptically from his home in the UK, regarding the then-yet-to-be-titled new record. "And even if they are expecting the unexpected, this won't be what they would expect."

Brown promises a true immersive performance beyond a typical rock concert. At its most basic, there will be music, costumes, projections, and movement – not to mention a massive selection of songs that span his long and shadowy career. The new album, he says, refers to the overarching theme of the show

as quite simply the "human perspective," or the struggle to find one's true identity.

"What if you don't just fall into one of the slots that advertising suggests for you?" he asks rhetorically. "What if I wasn't like that? You get back, eventually, to the level of just being where you can take on any identity. And then you find that in different parts of life, you may rest in one identity for a while because it's fruitful and beautiful."

Speaking of settling into an identity, one does have to wonder how the grandfather of shock rock operates in the modern age. It's one thing to perform in a musical landscape that has yet to experience Alice Cooper and Ozzy Osbourne, but surely none of these artists, Brown included, could be considered over-the-top compared to the very real shocks we are all witnessing unfold every day in the news.

"My very young years were when the second World War was ending," he reflects, "so you met a lot of the psychological conditions in people who had come back from bombing people. I was originally playing to the world that came out of that. But now, people are just afraid. And how I've dealt with it throughout my life is that I remain creative. And, of course, in the creative you have to have both the shadows and the light."

Arthur Brown will continue to explore both on his new album tour and, despite his age, shows no signs of slowing down. We sure hope not; this crazy world is counting on it. ❤️





## PLAY DEAD



## NOW PLAYING &gt; KARMA: THE DARK WORLD, CONFRONTED

## KARMA



## KARMA: THE DARK WORLD

Pollard Studio LLC, Wired Productions, Gamera Games  
PC, Playstation 4/5, Xbox X/S/One, Nintendo Switch

No one will blame you if you spend much of *Karma's* playing time fixated on how amazing this dystopian first-person narrative puzzler would be on VR. From its pan-anywhere camera to its motion-inspired interactions (push and pull the mouse to open doors and drawers, etc.), it's all gloriously cinematic as it casts players into an alternate 1980s East Germany, full of corporate malevolence and human experimentation – and brain diving. The latter being where the majority the game's surrealist environs spawn from; nightmarish “memory” places where eyeballs grow from walls, folks have CRT monitors for heads (like the TV men in those *Skibidi Toilet* viral YouTube shorts), *Twin Peaks'* notorious Red Room has been re-en-

visioned as the scene of a traumatic familial breakdown, and there's a strange black substance that seemingly ties into everything.

The game jumps between multiple points in time and multiple POVs, unravelling in a constantly twisting and often downright hallucinatory manner, leaving players feeling much like the Roam Agent for the Thought Bureau whom they embody, struggling to connect the pieces. There's loads of gore but no real combat; when monsters are encountered, players flee or defeat the baddie using puzzle- and timing-based mechanics (often with the help of a camera, of all things).

If there are any shortcomings in *Karma*, it's that most of the puzzles aren't terribly challenging, especially if you're an observant player, and the “run” function doesn't feel like running, resulting in a bizarre sensation when the game has you dashing for your life from a horrifying dual-headed, multi-armed, mutated human and you never move faster than a brisk walk. *Karma*



is also incredibly linear; there's a single way to progress through the story and area objectives need to be met before the next area opens.

Even so, the game provides an outstanding immersive experience from its bleak “corporation above all” slogans and propaganda posters to its wild liminal spaces and jarring jump scares and genuinely compelling narrative. Despite its admittedly limited replay value, if *Karma* ever gets a VR port, I'll join the Leviathan Corporation again in an Orwellian heartbeat.

MONICA S. KUEBLER



HEADSHOTS: FEELS LIKE PLAYING A MOVIE. INCREDIBLE WORLD-BUILDING

MISFIRES: NOT PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING, SLOW “RUNNING” GETS IN THE WAY OF TOTAL IMMERSION

## CONFRONTED



## CONFRONTED

Grumpy Rock Studios  
PC

First-person stealth-survival horror games are as common as dirt, but there's ample reason why – wandering around a dimly lit environment while defenseless against the monsters that inhabit it is a fairly straightforward way to deliver the thrills and chills. The debut game from Grumpy Rock Studios is gorgeous but fails to fully deliver on the strategic aspects of its stealthy premise.

Players don the layered petticoats of Dorinela, who is returning to Radu Castle in search of her sort-of estranged husband. Dorinela's not stoked about it – for reasons that are obvious (it's terrifying, with a cellar dungeon that's loaded with torture paraphernalia) and reasons that are as-of-yet-unclear (her husband doesn't seem like

the greatest guy). But poor feng shui and marital drama aside, Radu Castle is also infested by an unspeakable evil, made apparent through the fragments of correspondence Dorinela finds throughout the place and the hideous creatures that lurk the castle's corridors, delighted to one-shot the girl into an early grave. All she has at her disposal are the wooden boards she can use to barricade herself under tables, between doorways, and into crawlspaces. Do you have what it takes to stealth your way through Castle Radu and uncover its many secrets?

First, the good: the Gothic atmosphere is impeccable. From the drippy cellar walls to the gore-spattered guillotines, you'd have to be already dead to not be creeped out by the place. There are some decent environmental puzzles to contend with (i.e., lighting candles in the right order), but that brings us into the less-good: there's a strong implication that Dorinela must



be strategic in managing her scarce resources and determining the best moments/places to hide but the monster attacks are too frequent and random to really have time to think about it, making those encounters feel more luck-based than calculated. That said, *Confronted* is still in Early Access and its solo developer appears to be very amenable to feedback, so here's hoping that subsequent chapters scratch deeper into the surface and deliver on some of the game's more interesting promises.

ANDREA SUBISSATI



HEADSHOTS: SCARCE RESOURCES AND SLOW BUILDING GET THE HEART PUMPING!

MISFIRES: MONSTER ATTACKS TOO RANDOM TO STRATEGIZE FOR






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A  
**MONSTER**  
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TURBULENT TIMES WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS DOWN SOUTH HAVE MADE CANADIANS TAKE STOCK OF OUR HERITAGE. WHICH MADE US WONDER: WHAT HORROR FILM BEST CONVEYS THE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE? TWO LOSERS ENTER THE RING TO DUKE IT OUT, EH! ELBOWS UP!

## WHAT IS THE MOST QUINTESSENTIALLY CANADIAN HORROR FILM EVER MADE?

### MY BLOODY VALENTINE (1981)

#### DR. BENNY GRAVES

"The 1981 slasher by George Mihalka is as Canuck as a moose gone sugar mad from munching on a maple Timbit."

CANADA! THE GREAT WHITE NORTH! MY YANKEE RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR KINDER NORTHERN NEIGHBOUR IS AN UNABASHEDLY LOVING ONE, DESPITE the activities of the hemorrhoid that is our current administration. I'm a sucker for a good poutine, adore the drawl on your "sawry," and believe wholeheartedly that "pylon" is a way cooler and more sci-fi sounding term for a traffic cone. But aside from those northern lights, Canada is no slouch when it comes to horror movies. I could wax poetic on the proto-slasher eeriness of *Black Christmas* or spend pages discussing the wet and squishy cinematic impact of David Cronenberg. However, when it comes to horror that feels quintessentially Canadian, the clear choice is *My Bloody Valentine*. The 1981 slasher by George Mihalka is as Canuck as a moose gone sugar mad from munching on a maple Timbit.

For starters, the entire town of Valentine Bluffs remains impacted by the mine explosion that took place twenty years ago. The mad cannibal spectre of the single survivor, Harry Warden, hangs heavy over the town, colouring the lives of all who lived through it and their offspring to the point where they don't even (gasp!) observe Valentine's Day anymore! In America, disasters of fatal negligence occur hourly and we just keep on making donuts (sadly Dunkin', not Timmy's). Doubly Canadian are *MBV*'s characters: it's impossible to imagine Hollis, with his glorious Canadian moustache, belonging to Kid Rock's America. The fact that these twentysomething miners cool off by drinking, playing harmonica, and cooking frozen dinners on an engine block is proto-*Trailer Park Boys* excellence if I ever saw it.

But most importantly to this debate, it's the violence in *My Bloody Valentine* that is so decidedly Canadian that it takes the whole Beavertail. Harry Warden plants pick-axes in chests, perforates skulls with showerheads, and punctures jaw bones in a manner that could only be conceived of by a populace that wears shorts all winter. This legacy of brutality continues to this day with such excellent Canadian fare as *In a Violent Nature*. I can't blame you guys for craving blood, though – you're neighbours with the country that created Kid Rock. 🍷

### ROCK 'N' ROLL NIGHTMARE (1987)

#### ADAM CLARKE

"Canucks know: real heroes don't change the world with guns and grand gestures, but through sweetness, guile, and maple-syrup-drenched humility."

CANADA IS RIFE WITH HORROR, NOT JUST IN THE "FORD NATION" SENSE. CANADA'S PRODUCED MANY ENDURING HORROR MOVIES, TOO. *CURTAINS* IS A #metoo slasher that puts the "ick" in "yonic imagery." *Videodrome* warned us about television better than any "house hippo" PSA ever could. Yet, only one film contains all the elements of our national identity to be the most Canadian horror, a.k.a. "a part of our scare-itage": John Fasnano's direct-to-video horror musical from 1987, *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare*.

Canadian audiences tend to favour the tragic – one of our best comedies, 1998's *Last Night*, ends with humanity's extinction! *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare* opens with tragedy on a somewhat smaller scale as a boy

loses his parents to a clumsy puppet that looks like it failed its audition for *Freaky Stories*. Then we flash forward to the hair metal '80s to find B.C. rocker-bodybuilder-terribly-nice-guy Jon Mikl Thor and his Def Leppard-esque band, The Tritonz, driving through what appears to be the opening credits of *Kids in the Hall*. They arrive at a recording studio situated in a farmhouse (?) in Ontario. Thor insists that recording in Canada is vital to making a hit record, telling a skeptical bandmate that "Toronto's where it's happening, man! The music! The film industry! The arts!"

Americans might not clock it, but it's a well-known Canadian idiom that moving to Toronto (pronounced "Trawnno") fixes all your problems. Heck, we've been saying that since *Gain' Down the Road*...

It turns out the farmhouse studio is infested with demons, but even as the Devil himself comes to claim Thor's uber-pure soul, he remains a steadfast bastion of Canadian politeness who doesn't go in for substance abuse and wom-anizing. Why? In a last-minute twist, Thor is revealed to be an angel who lured Satan to a barn in Markham for a final showdown. Canucks know: real heroes don't change the world with guns and grand gestures, but through sweetness, guile, and maple-syrup-drenched humility. What could be more quintessentially Canadian than that? 🍷



#### LAST ISSUE'S WINNER AS VOTED BY YOU ON FACEBOOK

WHAT IS THE GREATEST FICTIONAL MUSICAL ACT  
TO APPEAR IN A HORROR FILM?

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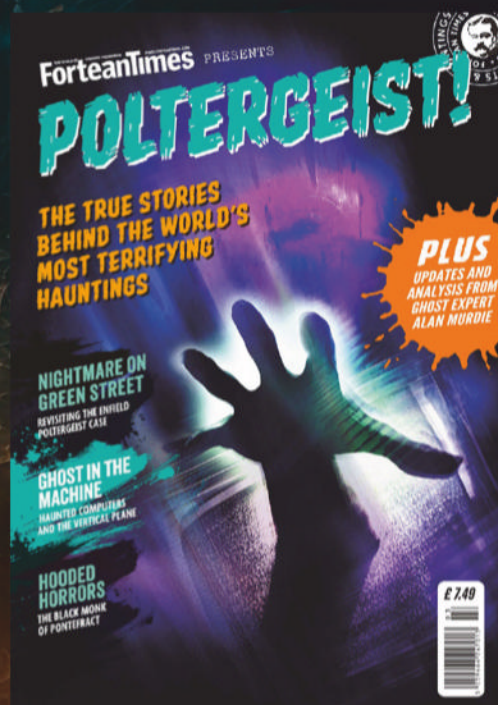
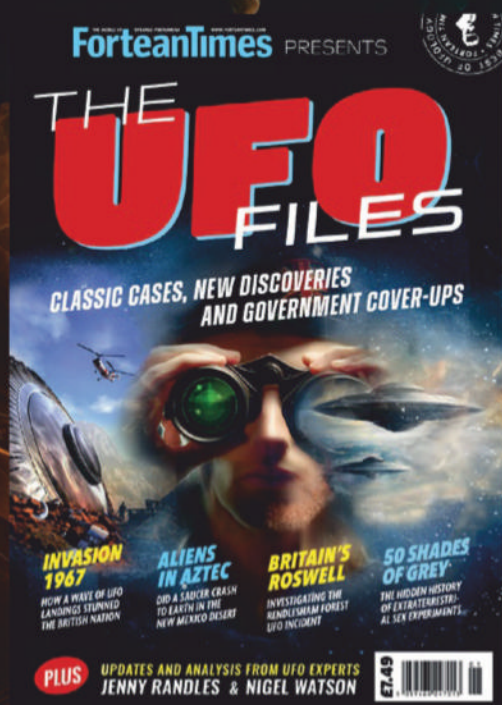
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THE VAMPIRE LESTAT  
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WINSLOW LEACH IS THE GREATEST FICTIONAL MUSICAL ACT  
TO APPEAR IN A HORROR FILM



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